OFSTED

PRIMARY EDUCATION

A Review of Primary Schools in England, 1994 - 1998

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INTRODUCTION

The last survey by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) of primary education in England[1] was published in September 1978 by the Department of Education and Science. It was based on a random, stratified sample of 542 schools and it was conducted by a small team of HMI who made visits to all the schools in the sample.

The final section of the 1978 survey was entitled "Looking Forward" and concluded:

> *Taking primary schools as a whole, the curriculum is probably wide enough to serve current educational needs. But the demands of society seem likely to continue to rise; literacy and numeracy will no doubt remain matters of great interest but priorities may well change within these areas and in other parts of the curriculum. The immediate aim, especially for the average and more able pupils, should probably be to take what is done to greater depth rather than to introduce content that is new to primary education. To do this it is important to make full use, on behalf of schools as a whole, of teachers' strengths and to build on the existing knowledge of individual teachers without losing the advantages that are associated with the class teacher system.*

These concerns about the quality and standards of primary education were taken up in another well known report. In December 1991 the Secretary of State asked Professor Robin Alexander, Jim Rose HMI (Chief Inspector for Primary Education) and Chris Woodhead (Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council) to "review available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools" in order "to make recommendations about curriculum organisation, teaching methods and classroom practice appropriate for the successful implementation of the National Curriculum particularly in Key Stage 2".

The focus of the report, entitled *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools*,[2] was teaching: its quality; subject expertise, teaching roles and staff deployment; and initial training, induction and in-service training. In some respects the report anticipated changes to the organisation of the curriculum in primary schools:

> *Over the last few decades the progress of primary pupils has been hampered by the influence of highly questionable dogmas which have led to excessively complex classroom practices and devalued the place of subjects in the curriculum. The resistance to subjects at the primary stage is no longer tenable. The subject is a necessary feature of the modern primary curriculum.*
>
> *There is clear evidence to show that much topic work has led to fragmentary and superficial teaching and learning. There is also ample evidence to show that teaching focused on single subjects benefits primary pupils.*

A major issue addressed by the report was how to secure sufficient subject expertise in primary schools to keep pace with pupils' developing abilities and meet the expectations of the National Curriculum:

> *The extent of subject knowledge required in order to teach the National Curriculum is more than can reasonably be expected of many class teachers, especially but not exclusively in the upper years of Key Stage 2.*
>
> *Every primary school should, in principle, have direct access to specialist expertise in all nine National Curriculum subjects and in religious education.*

The report made recommendations about effective methods of teaching and of classroom organisation, and about the deployment of teachers beyond the traditional "one teacher one class" model:

> *The organisational strategies of whole-class teaching, group work and individual teaching need to be used more selectively and flexibly. The criterion for choice must be fitness for purpose. In many schools the benefits of whole-class teaching have been insufficiently exploited.*
>
> *Primary teaching roles are currently too rigidly conceived and much greater flexibility in staff deployment is*

needed. We recommend the introduction of semi-specialist and specialist teaching in primary schools to strengthen the existing roles of class teacher and consultant. There is a particular case for concentrating specialist teaching at the upper end of Key Stage 2.

Twenty years on from the review of primary education, and approaching a decade after the publication of the "Three Wise Men" report (the *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice* report came out around Christmas 1992), OFSTED is in a strong position to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the maintained primary schools in England and on the issues confronting them.

The four year review: the evidence base

Following the Education (Schools) Act 1992, the first cycle of inspections was completed in July 1998. By this time every primary school in England had been inspected and inspection reports, including a summary report for parents, had been published. This four-year review of primary education is based principally on the evidence from the inspections of primary schools carried out by registered inspectors and their teams. The number of primary schools inspected increased each year, reflecting the growth in the number of inspectors qualified to conduct inspections, and the involvement of many "Additional Inspectors"[3] employed by OFSTED between 1995 and 1997 on short-term secondments and trained to inspect by HMI.

The scale of the evidence base from these inspections including individual lesson observation forms to the published inspection reports on over 18,000 primary schools is colossal. Over the period of the first inspection cycle, about 200,000 pre-Key Stage 1 lessons were inspected, 400,000 at Key Stage 1 and over 650,000 lessons at Key Stage 2, a total of over 1,250,000 lessons inspected over the four-year period. This has created a unique record of primary school education in England at the end of the twentieth century.

This review also makes use of a wide range of other evidence available on the standards of achievement in English primary schools and the quality of education provided. It draws on the National Curriculum test data for the four years, providing an increasingly accurate picture of standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. It draws on the findings from HMI inspection surveys carried out during the same period, for example: the inspection of the teaching of reading in three local education authorities and the inspection of the teaching of number in three local education authorities; the evaluation reports on the National Numeracy and Literacy Projects; and surveys of aspects of pedagogy such as the use of specialist teachers at Key Stage 2 and the use of setting in primary schools.

The review also reports on the findings of the inspection of primary-phase initial teacher training, especially training to teach reading and number; and the progress made by schools identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. In other words, while the review draws principally on the extensive database released by the Section 9 and Section 10 statutory inspections, it also draws on a considerable range of other data and inspection evidence. Finally, it refers to research commissioned by OFSTED, such as that into international comparisons. Above all, it takes as its theme the drive to raise standards through school improvement.

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1 *Primary Education in England, A Survey by HM Inspectors of Schools*. DES, 1978.

2 Alexander R, Rose A.J., and Woodhead C. (1992) *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools. A discussion paper.* DES.

3 For further information see *The Additional Inspector Project*. OFSTED, 1997.

Chapter 1
MAIN FINDINGS AND COMMENTARY

1.1 Main findings

- The quality of education in primary schools has improved over the four years of the inspection cycle. More pupils are achieving higher standards by the time they transfer to secondary school; the quality of teaching has improved; and headteachers, teachers and governors now give greater attention to raising standards and improving their schools. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, particularly in literacy and numeracy, in most schools. About 3 per cent of schools fail to provide an acceptable standard of education, with a further 8 per cent having serious weaknesses.

- The proportion of pupils reaching the basic threshold of Level 2[4] in reading and writing at Key Stage 1 has remained at about 80 per cent over the four years. There has been a modest improvement in standards of mathematics, rising from 78 per cent at Level 2 in 1995 to 84 per cent in 1998. About one in five pupils, therefore, has not achieved the expected standards in the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and mathematics at transfer from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2.

- At Key Stage 2 there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 in English and mathematics. This proportion has risen by about 15 percentage points over the four years. A similar improvement is needed over the next four years if government targets are to be met by the year 2002.

- While there has been some increase in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 3 or better, about one in ten pupils leaves primary school without having achieved Level 3. These pupils are poorly equipped to face the demands of the secondary curriculum.

- More pupils reach the expected level of attainment in reading than in writing. It is a particular concern that there is a considerable gap between the achievement of girls and boys, particularly in writing, where in 1998 girls outperformed boys by 16 percentage points. There are few signs that this gap is narrowing.

- Progress varies as pupils move through school. They make good progress in the earlier years, but there is a dip in Years 3 and 4, the beginning of Key Stage 2. Progress then improves and is greatest in Year 6.

- Pupils make good progress in three in ten schools. In about six in ten schools they make satisfactory progress, although it is unlikely that this rate of progress will be sufficient to ensure that four out of five pupils will reach the national targets for English by 2002. There was substantial underachievement in one in 14 schools at Key Stage 1 and one in ten at Key Stage 2.

- Standards of achievement have improved in most subjects over the past four years. Nevertheless, serious problems remain with design and technology and are even more acute in information technology in over four in ten schools.

- The greatest challenges are faced by schools serving disadvantaged areas. The link between low attainment and disadvantage is strong and persistent. There are, however, schools which achieve well against the odds; and for any given level of socio-economic factors there is a wide variation between the performance of the best and worst schools.

- Over the four years of the inspection programme the quality of teaching has improved, with 1998 being the first year in which the teaching of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science was better than the teaching of all other subjects. The proportion of good teaching has risen at Key Stage 2 to over one-half, and that of overall unsatisfactory teaching has fallen to one in 14 schools. This improvement is striking, but there are still over a quarter

of a million pupils in schools where the teaching is unsatisfactory.

- Several factors underpin this improvement. There has been an improvement in teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding of the subjects they teach. As teachers have become more familiar with the programmes of study, their planning has improved and learning objectives have been more precisely defined. Above all, there has been an increase in the amount of direct, whole-class teaching. This is not an easy option, however, and requires a secure subject knowledge, clear instructive teaching and skilled questioning.

- The quality of leadership and management is good or very good in just over half of schools; it is weak in about one in eight schools. There is a strong link between the quality of the leadership and management and the quality of the teaching. Important aspects of leadership are the sense of educational direction given by a headteacher, the extent and impact of the monitoring of the work of teachers, and the evaluation of curriculum initiatives. The weakest aspects of leadership and management have been the monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice.

- The role of governors has changed in recent years; the demands made of them are greater and their responsibilities are clearer. The overall picture is one of governors supporting their schools positively and effectively, and dealing with their duties with dedication. There is considerable variation in practice, however, and in about one-quarter of schools the governors are poorly placed to influence the education provided.

- Headteachers are particularly successful at establishing a positive ethos in their schools. This is one of the great strengths of English primary schools, and is illustrated by many positive indicators. The behaviour of pupils is good in four out of five primary schools, and poor in only 2 per cent of schools. Virtually all primary schools are orderly, safe communities in which children are taught to respect each other, their teachers, other adults and property.

- Attendance, too, is good in the vast majority of schools, falling below 90 per cent in only about 4 per cent of schools. Most schools work hard to ensure regular attendance and have effective procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance.

- Most schools adapted well to implementing the National Curriculum by meeting the expectation that the curriculum should be broadly based, balanced and relevant. More recently, the strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy has meant that primary schools have had to review their priorities and to consider the balance between the essential basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the rest of the curriculum.

- Wide-ranging topic work, in which elements of several subjects were taught, has given way over the four years to work which focuses on a single subject. This has contributed strongly to the improvement in work in most subjects. At the same time it has helped pupils to apply or consolidate their skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

- Greater and more effective use of assessment data has helped schools to establish targets for improvement and to analyse more precisely the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching programmes. Not all schools make the best use of the data available, for example to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils.

- The quantity and quality of learning resources are inadequate in one in ten schools; resources for teaching English are a particular cause for concern, although there has recently been a significant reallocation of spending priorities towards literacy. Accommodation is good in less than half the schools, but there has been a significant move in recent years to make school grounds and buildings more secure. Most schools have sufficient qualified and experienced teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum, although the pupilteacher ratio rose in each year of the inspection cycle.

- There has been, in recent years, a marked improvement in the attention given on initial teacher training courses to training in the teaching of reading and number work. Mental calculation and phonics are now given a greater and more appropriate priority.

- The main issues facing the training partnerships are how to ensure consistency in assessing the trainees; and how to ensure that trainees receive comparable training experiences of sufficiently high quality.

1.2 Commentary and recommendations

Primary schools are getting better. Taking primary education, pre-five to eleven plus, as a whole, while there is still too much unevenness in the system, it is irrefutable that more teachers are teaching more effectively than was the case four years ago.

There is more good practice in every subject of the National Curriculum and in government-funded provision for under-fives. As a result, more children are getting a better primary education and the nation is receiving a better return for its £6.5 billion annual investment in our primary schools.

This overall picture of progress is drawn from an unprecedented amount of information about the performance of pupils and teachers in primary schools and about such important matters as the resources and management systems which support them. As a nation, we almost certainly lead the world in the amount of information we hold on school and pupil performance, particularly when the data from national tests are added to that of inspection.

Impressive though this information base may be, it is of little value unless it can be used to improve practice and raise standards. It is all too easy to become 'information-rich and action-poor'. What is at issue is how we make best use of this rich information about primary schools to accelerate the raising of standards, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged areas. Progress is being made, but it needs to be faster and more extensive if we are to meet the Government's targets for primary education for 2002.

The significance of those targets invites comment because they stand as a proxy for national concerns, as well as for national confidence in those who teach in our primary schools and those who provide for primary education. The targets recognise the priority that primary schools must give to raising standards of English and mathematics, at the heart of which are pupils' achievements in literacy and numeracy.

The widespread belief that standards of pupil achievement in primary schools have been too low for far too long is strongly supported by this review. What most people have in mind when the issue of low standards of achievement is discussed are standards of reading, writing, number knowledge and the skills of calculation the foundation work of primary schools. Whatever might be said about changes in the national tests and in the Framework for Inspection over this four-year period, there has been sufficient stability in both to indicate that standards in these crucially important areas in 1994 were woefully low. They are now much better, though not yet good enough if our children are to have the best chances of leading fulfilled lives and succeeding in a world economy where high educational standards will continue to be of paramount importance.

Perhaps the message that most needs to be heeded from the inspection of primary schools over the last four years is that the primary phase, which covers the greater part of statutory education, is not only important in its own right but also has a crucial "make or break" influence on what follows. Insofar as it is possible to make like-for-like comparisons, primary schools serving similar socio-economic populations can vary to the extent that over two years' difference can be made to a pupil's progress, depending on the school he or she attends. All of these points argue that we must continue to strive for much greater consistency in the quality of our primary schools.

Primary schools know full well that they must give top priority to making sure that their pupils are taught the "basic skills" as effectively as possible. Many schools, however, continue to struggle with the long-standing problem of providing a broad and balanced curriculum, of which the statutory National Curriculum and religious education are but a part, while giving sufficient attention to what has become an enlarged programme of basic skills. For example, the latter now includes information technology along with the traditional skills of literacy and numeracy. Schools have to decide how time is to be apportioned to these priorities, so that the curriculum does not become so narrow as to stultify pupils' wider progress in subjects such as art, music and physical education or so broad that little or nothing is taught very well. The most successful schools are efficient users of the time available for teaching and are imaginative in what they do to extend teaching and learning time through, for example, homework and extracurricular activities.

Of all the issues facing primary education over the last four years, the teaching of reading has almost certainly caused the greatest professional debate and public concern. Despite the introduction of a detailed framework for teaching reading and other key aspects of literacy within the National Literacy Strategy, how best to teach the early stages of reading remains a contentious issue, albeit from a much changed perspective about the central importance of teaching phonics. The professional debate has shifted markedly. Few, if any, now seriously disagree with the well researched position which insists that children must be taught essential phonic knowledge and skills from an early stage. The debate is no longer so much about whether to teach phonics, but rather about how to teach phonic knowledge and skills efficiently and effectively so that children can enjoy early success and read effortlessly. Inspection and test results show that the vast majority of children are capable of achieving these goals by the end of Key Stage 1.

Many teachers need to update considerably their knowledge of phonic work in order to teach it well. This reflects a period of neglect of this crucial aspect of reading in both initial and in-service teacher training. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the phonic component, ie the "word level" work in the literacy hour of the Government's National Literacy Strategy, is often the weakest aspect of the teaching of reading and continues to need urgent attention in many schools.

The importance of phonic work attaches to more than reading. Over this four-year period it has become clear that children's writing skills also require more attention and are heavily dependent upon an understanding of phonics, the effective teaching of spelling and handwriting, and opportunities for wider reading.

Two serious problems in many primary schools, highlighted by HMCI's Annual Reports and by this review, are the considerably poorer literacy performance of boys in comparison with that of girls, and the dip in the overall performance of primary pupils which has occurred persistently in Year 3 and to a lesser extent in Year 4. Common sense suggests that each of these problems compounds the other. Given that differences in pupil achievement emerge at an early stage and can widen alarmingly, the close monitoring of pupil performance deserves more attention. Although some schools consistently monitor pupil performance for example, to address gender and ethnic concerns for many this is not a well developed practice.

It is difficult to spell out exactly how the gender differences in achievement might be overcome. For boys, it is likely that more thorough teaching of the basic skills of reading to help them to achieve early success, accompanied by more appealing reading material and more challenging opportunities to write about interests other than fictional stories, would help to close the gap. The national initiatives to encourage parents to do more to support reading at home, combined with schools' efforts to enlist the help of parents, are also showing promising results.

The dip in the performance of certain year groups of pupils, most often Years 3 and 4, goes unheeded in too many schools. Whatever the reasons for this uneven pattern of performance by year group, the problem needs to be taken seriously because many Year 3 and Year 4 pupils, especially boys, are often at a critical stage in consolidating hard-won skills of reading and writing. Headteachers should be wary of deploying the least experienced or the weakest teachers in a particular year group such as Year 3 in the hope that any ground lost by the pupils in these year groups can be made up later.

Schools must also address two other important variables that influence pupil performance, which are different but often overlapping: ethnicity and poverty. Over the period of this review, some primary schools have amply demonstrated that it is possible to raise pupils' achievement despite distinctly unpromising social and economic home backgrounds. In the case of schools containing pupils from ethnic minorities, many of whom have to learn English as an additional language, there have been some spectacular successes, showing how focused, well-structured teaching can accelerate learning so that pupils achieve good standards of literacy and numeracy, and much else, by the age of eleven. The attitude which prevails in these successful schools is a powerful intolerance of underachievement and a refusal to accept variables related to pupils' home backgrounds as an excuse for a lack of progress. All that said, it must be acknowledged that teachers in these circumstances often face problems which many others simply do not have to tackle to anything like the same extent. These conditions are certainly sufficient to justify additional resources, for example to allow schools to employ teaching assistants. Indeed, inspection shows that well-trained teaching assistants are a key resource and are used very effectively in many primary schools. More importantly, there is a clear case for assuring better pupilteacher ratios in schools serving areas of social and economic disadvantage, especially at Key Stage 1.

In one sense this review provides a glance in the rear-view mirror to make sure we are not overtaken by the mistakes of the past and are better prepared for what lies ahead. We would do well to remember that primary schools have been through a period of considerable turbulence. Primary school teachers, for example, bore the brunt of curricular reform. The National Curriculum and its assessment were introduced first into primary schools, closely followed by a new inspection regime. They had to accommodate other major reforms, such as more open enrolment and an enlarged responsibility for managing their budgets. In many respects these reforms have been welcome, and indeed essential. However, there has hardly been a breathing space for primary schools since the 1988 Education Reform Act, let alone over the last four years, during which one reform has had the time to settle down before others have followed, or changes have been made to those already introduced. All of this suggests that primary schools would benefit from a period of greater stability in which to consolidate and build upon what, arguably, has been the most extensive programme of educational reform in living memory.

Primary teachers, and particularly primary headteachers, have had to become much more management-minded as responsibilities for devolved budgets and school resources, including staffing, have grown. The most effective headteachers are good managers but are not infected with "managerialism", as if management existed to serve itself. They understand the difference between leadership and management. In order to reduce bureaucracy, to focus upon monitoring and raising standards of pupil achievement, and to create a context for teachers to give of their best, they challenge themselves with such questions as, "What am I managing for?" and "How will proposed changes benefit the pupils and improve what exists already?"

Primary schools, because they are relatively small institutions, have to manage both the benefits and the obstacles arising from their size. On the one hand they gain from a keen sense of teamwork, in which the whole staff can communicate easily and, given good leadership, respond swiftly to agreed changes in policy and practice. On the other hand, it is clear that their

expertise, for example in providing consistently high-quality teaching in all the subjects and aspects of the curriculum, is often fully stretched. The average-sized primary school is rarely able to employ sufficient teachers to have a one-to-one co-ordinator for each subject, or time for subject co-ordinators to carry out important aspects of their role, such as monitoring teaching, during the school day.

The use of topic work, whereby several subjects are integrated under a common theme such as "ourselves" or "buildings", which many teachers found difficult to manage and which led to much superficial work for many pupils, is now far less common. Teachers are focusing more rigorously upon the programmes of study for each subject and planning lessons accordingly. The demise of broadly based topic work and the stronger emphasis on subject teaching, encouraged by the National Curriculum, have required a greater command of subject knowledge on the part of primary teachers. To expect class teachers to teach every subject to pupils who may well, by the end of Key Stage 2, be achieving beyond Level 4 in the core subjects, is a tall order.

Over the last four years some primary schools have begun to take steps to organise pupils and teachers in different ways, so as to make better use of the subject expertise available in the school. In many schools there is now a greater use of teachers with particular expertise to teach classes other than their own. Music and physical education have long been treated in this way, but the approach now often encompasses other subjects.

The wider use of specialist teaching has been accompanied by an increase in grouping pupils by ability for some subjects, particularly English and mathematics at Key Stage 2. This has often been done by creating ability sets from more than one class, thus making it easier for the teacher to plan and match the work to the developing abilities of the pupils and the requirements of the National Curriculum. While these arrangements for deploying teachers and organising pupils do not in themselves guarantee success, they offer considerable potential for good teaching to be made available to more children than may be the case where, typically, one class teacher teaches all the curriculum to the same class for at least one school year.

Given the clear link between teaching quality and pupil achievement, the availability of teachers with sufficient subject expertise remains a key issue for primary schools. Because they have a thorough grasp of the subject matter that they are required to teach, good teachers are not only able to set high expectations but they also understand the incremental steps, ie the progression, that pupils have to make to fulfil curricular expectations. They are thus well equipped to promote both continuity and progression in the primary curriculum. Unfortunately, all too often the subject expertise available within a school remains underused because the teachers concerned are confined to working with their own class.

By one means or another, primary schools have had to build expertise to keep pace with the fast-growing field of information and communication technology as well as teaching the programme of study for information technology. Information technology remains the weakest subject in the primary curriculum overall, although there is evidence of high attainments and exemplary work by many pupils in a few schools. We are thus unwittingly developing two populations of pupils, with those who are able to benefit from IT-literate homes and from schools where information technology is well taught rapidly outpacing those where neither of these conditions applies.

Primary education is essentially a person-to-person service in which teachers and pupils alike benefit from constructive feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their work, together with clear guidance about what they need to do to improve. Sadly, however, the appraisal of teaching remains a seriously weak feature in primary schools, as in schools in general. Despite or perhaps because of the close teamwork that is a feature of many primary schools, there seems to be a reluctance rigorously to appraise teachers, including headteachers, with the intention of managing performance to raise pupil achievement.

It is by no means unusual, however, for headteachers, teachers and governors to press for more feedback about their work from inspectors. There is, it seems, an unresolved tension between the reluctance to tackle school-based appraisal and the appetite for more and better feedback, particularly about teaching, from inspection. Some progress might be made on resolving this tension were more schools to consider using the OFSTED Framework and Guidance for Inspection to align their appraisal requirements more closely with the inspection criteria for judging teaching quality. The issues of performance management will be thrown into sharp relief as a result of developments stemming from the recent Green Paper.[5]

Surveys of parents' views conducted by OFSTED over this four-year period show that they are concerned about their children's achievement and what they often describe as their children's "happiness" at school. Many, for example, suggest that homework ought to feature more strongly in the programme for older primary pupils and would like clearer information about their children's progress. High on their list of concerns, of course, are children's safety and welfare. They seek reassurance that bullying and racial discrimination will not be tolerated. Inspection shows that the great majority of primary schools are safe and orderly communities in which children are taught to respect each other, their teachers, other adults and property. Norms of

good behaviour, fairness and an understanding of right and wrong actions are generally well established in primary schools. Attendance rates are generally good.

Insidious harassment and bullying are difficult for schools to deal with and call for constant vigilance, clear policies and decisive action, including the creation of a climate which makes it easy for children to tell their teachers about these problems rather than suffer in silence. While overt bullying, discrimination and harassment are not tolerated, and the vast majority of primary schools rightly take a stand on these issues, it is difficult for them always to hold the line against poor relationships which may exist in the neighbourhood. Although pupils may behave well in school, the school cannot so easily inoculate them, for example, from prejudice which may persist outside its gates. Clearly, a greater all-round effort must be made to support schools in these respects, drawing upon the experience of the most successful local networks which some schools enjoy.

Though a cliché, the picture which emerges from this four-year review is one of cautious optimism. Primary schools are much more focused than ever before on raising standards of pupil achievement and less willing to tolerate professional weaknesses and ideologies that depress pupils' progress. They need to build on their successes through the relentless pursuit of better-quality teaching consistently applied in all year groups.

It follows that the temptation to pour more educational quarts into primary pint pots should be resisted in order to give primary schools the opportunity they need to develop the quality of their work and capitalise on the reforms set in place.

The Government is making a determined effort to raise standards of pupil achievement through a broad range of policy initiatives and reforms that are either in place or in the pipeline. The findings of this four-year review point to four main recommendations for the continued improvement of primary education and the achievement of the ambitious national targets. These recommendations are not, of course, exhaustive, but all those involved with primary education should:

- provide a period of stability for primary schools to implement fully and consolidate the extensive programme of reforms, rather than introduce more that is new to an already stretched system;
- make sure that the expectations and priorities for primary schools are clearly understood, manageable and adequately resourced;
- give top priority to supporting the work of teachers in their classrooms. This will require far more robust teacher-appraisal arrangements than presently exist, linked to targeted training and close monitoring of the applications and outcomes of that training, in order to determine how well it advances pupils' progress;
- audit the use of the considerable resources that the Government has put into, and plans to put into, primary education, so as to make sure those resources support the priorities for which they are intended.

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4 Level 2 is the level 'expected of seven-year-olds'. Level 4 is the level 'expected of eleven-year-olds'. Taken from: *Results of the 1997 NC assessments*. DfEE, 1997.

5 *Teachers Meeting the Challenge of Change*, DfEE, 1999.

Chapter 2
PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

2.1 The schools, the pupils and the teachers

In 1994 there were 18,679 maintained primary schools providing full-time education for 3,944,635 pupils. In 1998 the number of schools had fallen to 18,230 (a fall of 2.4 per cent) and the number of full-time pupils had risen to 4,109,624 (a rise of 4.2 per cent). There were about 83,000 more boys than girls receiving full-time primary education in 1998. The number of pupils receiving part-time education, almost always in nursery schools or as pupils under the age of five in nursery or reception classes in primary schools, rose from 267,385 in 1994 to 317,193 in 1998 (a rise of 18.6 per cent).

The number of pupils aged between five and ten attending independent schools rose from 185,200 in 1994 to 198,300 in 1998. In percentage terms this has remained virtually static, at around 5 per cent of the pupil population. OFSTED has some statutory responsibilities for inspecting independent schools, but this review does not report on this work. There are also relatively small numbers of pupils outside of the traditional school system, generally referred to as pupils "educated otherwise", perhaps being taught at home by their parents. In addition, there are excluded pupils, pupils in referral units, pupils for whom home tuition is provided, and pupils being educated in hospital schools or by social services. It is hard to establish a precise figure for the number of pupils falling into these categories, but it is probably about 8,000.

While the large majority of pupils are educated in local education authority maintained, non-denominational, combined infant and junior schools, there is some variation in the types of school.

As illustrated in Chart 1, 9 per cent of primary schools are first schools, with pupils usually transferring at eight or nine (the end of Year 3 or Year 4). Twelve per cent of schools are infant schools, with pupils transferring to junior schools at the end of Year 2. There are now only 191 middle "deemed primary" schools, with pupils transferring after Year 7.

Chart 2 shows that one in four schools (including grant maintained schools) has denominational links (either LEA controlled or voluntary aided status) with the Church of England; just under one in ten schools is Roman Catholic.

As indicated in Chart 3, 62 per cent of schools are LEA maintained, and under 3 per cent are grant maintained. Of the schools with denominational links, 57 per cent are voluntary aided, 43 per cent voluntary controlled. In terms of the numbers of pupils, 64 per cent are in through primary (infant and junior combined) schools, and 10 per cent are in first or middle schools. Seventy-two per cent of pupils are in non-denominational schools, 17 per cent in schools with Church of England status and 10 per cent in Roman Catholic schools. Seventy per cent of pupils are in LEA maintained schools, 3 per cent in grant maintained schools, 17 per cent in voluntary aided schools and 10 per cent in voluntary controlled schools.

Chart 4 illustrates the considerable variation in the size of primary schools; 3.3 per cent of schools have less than 50 pupils on roll.

For just under 7 per cent of the pupil population English is an additional language (EAL); these pupils attend in any significant numbers about one-quarter of schools. Four-fifths of primary schools have less than 5 per cent of EAL pupils; 6 per cent of schools have over 40 per cent of EAL pupils.

In 1998 the percentage of pupils identified by schools as having special educational needs, and included on their registers of special educational needs, was 19.9. Over the period of the review, the percentage of pupils in mainstream primary schools with Statements of Special Educational Need has risen slightly, from 1.2 per cent in 1994 to 1.5 per cent in 1998. Roughly twice as many pupils in junior schools have Statements of Special Educational Need than in infant schools.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals has remained relatively steady, averaging about 24 per cent of the pupil

population. The percentage has been slightly higher in infant schools than primary schools. By the end of the four-year period, there had been an increase of six percentage points in the number of schools with up to 10 per cent free school meals; the changes are illustrated in Chart 5.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is not, of course, evenly distributed throughout primary schools. For example, 41 per cent of schools have 10 per cent or less of their pupils eligible for free school meals, whereas around 11 per cent of schools have over 40 per cent of their pupils eligible for free school meals.

The number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers remained virtually unchanged over the period 1994 to 1998, reaching 181,394 in 1998. Ten per cent of these teachers are headteachers. There are considerably more women teachers than men teachers: 152,764 women in 1998, compared with 28,630 men. In other words, only 16 per cent of teachers in primary schools are men. Furthermore, the number of male teachers has fallen by 2,000 over the four years, and continues to decline as a proportion of the teaching force.

Over the four-year period there has been a significant change in the balance between men and women headteachers. In 1994 there were nearly equal numbers of men and women headteachers: 9,247 men, 9,435 women. By 1998, however, the number and proportion of women headteachers had risen considerably: 7,951 men, 10,362 women. As a proportion, about 57 per cent of headteachers are women, compared with 50.5 per cent in 1994.

The major change in staffing over the four years has been in education support staff. Numbers have increased significantly, by about 40 per cent, from 41,117 in 1994 to 58,055 in 1998. There have been increases in the numbers of most categories of education support staff; there are now 29 per cent more nursery assistants, and 52 per cent more special needs support staff. The numbers of support staff for minority ethnic pupils have risen by 35 per cent over the last two years. There has also been a rise of about 13 per cent in the number of administrative or clerical staff, reaching a total of 19,565 in 1998, of which the majority were secretaries, but an increasing number (about 1,500) were bursars.

English primary schools, then, are extremely diverse: in size, age range, location, population; in buildings, resources, staffing and traditions; and in links with churches and local authorities. While it is possible to construct a statistically average primary school, it is misleading to assume that there is such a thing as a typical primary school.

Chart 1 : Types of school as at 1998

Chart 2 : Denomination as at 1998

Chart 3 : Types of control of schools as at 1998

Chart 4 : Numbers on roll in primary schools (January 1998)

Chart 5 : Primary schools banded by number of pupils eligible for free school meals, 1995 and 1998

Chapter 3
EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 National Curriculum test results

Since 1995 all maintained schools have been required to test pupils at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, and the national figures have been reported annually by the DfEE. Devising annual tests with different test items that set the same standard each year poses very considerable challenges. Despite these, the tests are now firmly established in primary schools and provide an increasingly reliable picture of attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Test results are used to identify the National Curriculum level that pupils have achieved. They are also used by inspectors as one of the key criteria against which to judge pupils' progress and a school's effectiveness.

Initially, Level 2 at Key Stage 1 and Level 4 at Key Stage 2 were the levels that "average pupils" were expected to reach at the end of the respective key stage. The proportion of "average pupils" who should achieve these levels was not identified, but in 1995 and 1996 these levels were reported as the levels expected of the "typical pupil". Then, in 1998, the Government set national targets for English and mathematics, to be achieved by the year 2002. These targets identified the proportions of pupils to achieve Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2: 80 per cent in English, and 75 per cent in mathematics. These figures are much higher than those previously achieved, and present a formidable challenge for schools. However, the importance to be given to literacy and numeracy is reflected in these targets. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are so vital to the continuing education of pupils that in future the large majority of pupils should achieve what was expected of "average pupils" only five years ago.

Standards at Key Stage 1

Charts 6, 7 and 8 show pupils' performance in the Key Stage 1 tests over the past four years. The percentage of pupils reaching Level 2 (the level expected of seven-year-olds) has remained constant at about 80 per cent in reading and writing. In spelling, in 1995 and 1998, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2 was 66 per cent, significantly lower than the proportions for reading and writing. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 2 has increased steadily but not greatly, reaching 84 per cent in 1998. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls in mathematics, but in reading, writing and spelling at Key Stage 1, girls do substantially better. The difference in the number of girls and boys reaching Level 2 is about 10 percentage points, and this gap shows no signs of narrowing. It indicates that the underachievement of boys in literacy begins in the first few years of their education, and eventually this leads to many boys transferring to secondary schools with weak literacy skills that are often insufficient to cope with the demands of the secondary curriculum.

While the fact that four in five pupils reach Level 2 is in many ways encouraging, three points need to be made. First, one in five pupils does not reach this basic threshold. Second, Level 2 covers a wide range of attainment. It is subdivided into three grades, namely 2A, 2B and 2C, with 2A being the most demanding. However, many of the pupils who reach Level 2C at Key Stage 1 do not go on to reach Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2; the QCA has recently recommended that schools should look on grade 2B as the expected level of attainment for most children at the end of Key Stage 1. In 1998, the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2B or above was comparable to that of pupils reaching Level 4+ at the end of Key Stage 2. Third, there has been no appreciable improvement in standards in English at Key Stage 1, as measured by the national tests, over the last four years; many schools with Key Stage 1 pupils are not affected by the national targets because they are Key Stage 1 schools only.

Chart 6 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum test/task (English: reading)

199598

Chart 7 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum test/task (English: writing) 199598

Chart 8 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum test/task (mathematics) 199598

Standards at Key Stage 2

Charts 9, 10 and 11 show pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science. A number of key points stand out. There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 in mathematics and English. This proportion has increased by about 15 percentage points over the four years: a similar improvement is needed over the next four-year period if Government targets are to be met by the year 2002. It is a matter of concern that the trend of improvement has weakened in 1998. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where the proportion reaching Level 4 fell in 1998, in part due to the additional demands of the new mental arithmetic test. There has also been some increase in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 3 or better, but about one in ten pupils still leaves primary school without having achieved Level 3.

Within English, there are considerable differences in test results for reading and writing at Key Stage 2. Writing is significantly weaker. Information on these components of English has only been available for the last two years, but in 1998 71 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 for reading but only 53 per cent for writing. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls in English is wider than at Key Stage 1, and this gap has not reduced over the last four years. The differential achievement of boys and girls in the Key Stage 2 English tests is illustrated, for 1998, in Charts 12 and 13. Boys' achievement in writing is particularly weak, with only 45 per cent reaching Level 4 in Key Stage 2. This pulls down the overall performance of eleven-year-old pupils. It follows that the improvement of boys' writing will be of crucial importance if the Government's targets for English are to be achieved.

Chart 9 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test (English) 199598

Chart 10 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test (mathematics) 199598

Chart 11 : Percentage of pupils achieving each level in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test (science) 199598

Chart 12 : 1998 Key Stage 2 test results for reading

Chart 13 : 1998 Key Stage 2 test results for writing

3.2 Inspection evidence on achievement

Inspection also provides evidence of improvement in the standards achieved by pupils over the last four years, although changes in the inspection Framework make direct comparisons difficult. In 1994/95 inspectors judged that standards of achievement, taking account of pupils' capabilities, were unsatisfactory or poor, and that there was therefore substantial underachievement, in one in ten schools at Key Stage 1 and one in six at Key Stage 2. In the revised Framework used since 1996, the judgement that is closest to standards taking account of pupils' capabilities is the judgement of progress. In 1997/98 inspectors judged that pupils made good overall progress and achieved well in three in ten schools at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In about six in ten schools pupils made satisfactory progress, but there was substantial underachievement in one in 14 schools at Key Stage 1 and one in ten at Key Stage 2.

Charts 14 and 15 illustrate that pupils are learning more in lessons. Chart 14 shows the progress made in lessons for 1997/98. Chart 15 shows the proportion of lessons in which progress was judged to be good in the last two years of the review period. Two points stand out. First, progress varies as pupils move through the different years in a primary school. Pupils make good progress in the earlier years, but there is a dip in Years 3 and 4, the beginning of Key Stage 2. Progress then improves and is greatest in Year 6, perhaps because this is where primary schools often deploy their strongest teachers and where the National Curriculum tests now provide a sharp focus for the work. The second point is that, across all years, pupils made more progress in 1997/98 than in 1996/97.

The rate of progress made by pupils varies considerably between subjects. Charts 16 and 17 show progress for both key stages

in the National Curriculum subjects and religious education for 1997/98. Pupils are now making the most progress in the core subjects, reflecting the high and appropriate priority that schools are now giving to these subjects. Despite this additional attention to the core subjects, there is no evidence of a decline in the non-core subjects, with the exception of information technology. Inspectors report that standards achieved by pupils have risen gradually in most subjects over the last four years. Nevertheless, problems clearly remain with the rates of progress in some subjects. There is, for example, substantial underachievement at Key Stage 2 in design and technology in over one in four schools and in information technology in over four in ten schools. Progress in religious education and geography is good in less than one-quarter of the schools.

Chart 14 : Lessons in primary schools 1997/98: progress

Chart 15 : Percentage of lessons with good or better progress, comparing 1996/97 and 1997/98

Chart 16 : Progress in Key Stage 1 in 1997/98

Chart 17 : Progress in Key Stage 2 in 1997/98

3.3 Variation in the results achieved by primary schools

The variation in the results achieved by different primary schools is striking, and is illustrated in Chart 18. The average National Curriculum level for a sample of primary schools has been plotted against eligibility for free school meals, which remains a useful indicator of the level of disadvantage in a school. The chart shows that as disadvantage increases, the achievement of pupils reduces significantly. However, for any particular level of eligibility for free school meals the achievement of pupils varies considerably, by about one National Curriculum level overall. Given that pupils are expected to progress at about one level every two years, this means that pupils in low-achieving schools are about two years behind pupils in schools with similar levels of disadvantage that achieve well.

A further analysis of similar schools confirms this variation. Chart 19 shows a group of schools with similar characteristics across a number of indicators: number on roll; eligibility for free school meals; proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs; and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language. For this group of schools the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 ranged from about 16 per cent to 65 per cent.

Chart 18 : Average level achieved by pupils in 1998 Key Stage 2 tests against eligibility for free school meals for a random selection of primary schools

Chart 19 : Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 English in 1998 in a sample of 13 schools with similar characteristics

3.4 Schools serving disadvantaged areas

Few schools with high levels of disadvantage achieve results which are above the national average. The link between low attainment and disadvantage remains strong and persistent. However, as Chart 20 shows, between 1995 and 1998 schools with high levels of disadvantage have made a significantly larger increase than other schools in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 at Key Stage 2. While these schools have had considerable scope for improvement and many have a long way to go before they reach the national average, it is encouraging that their results are rising, and rising faster than results in more advantaged schools.

Chart 20 : Difference between 1995 and 1998 Key Stage 2 English Level 4+ results by average free school meal bands

3.5 The achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities

The standards achieved by pupils from ethnic minorities have improved over the last four years. Although the performance of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils in the early years of schooling remains depressed, once they become proficient in the

English language their attainment often matches or exceeds that of English first language pupils from similar backgrounds. For example, the OFSTED report on the teaching of reading in 45 inner-London primary schools[6] showed that Bangladeshi pupils achieved lower standards in Year 2 than any other minority ethnic group, but that they made good progress and by the end of Key Stage 2 their performance was very similar to other groups. White pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds performed less well overall than any other group. More recent evidence from the National Literacy Project showed that no ethnic minority group had a significantly lower performance than the average. Black Caribbean pupils, who often underachieve in secondary schools, generally make a sound start in primary schools.

In some areas, there are specific concerns about the underachievement of other ethnic minority groups, such as pupils of Turkish and Somali origin. Sometimes this is part of a more general anxiety about the underachievement of refugee pupils. Gypsy Traveller pupils are frequently hampered by poor attendance and are the group most at risk in the education system. Not surprisingly, when they are able to benefit from a settled period in a primary school, their progress improves, sometimes markedly.

3.6 International comparisons

An important impetus to the drive to "raise standards" has been given by the increasing availability of international comparisons of educational attainment, and by the increasing awareness of different approaches to teaching across the world. Significantly different systems of education appear to yield significantly different outcomes in terms of academic achievement.

Approaches observed in other countries have sometimes been tried in England. The approach to teaching reading known as "Reading Recovery" was developed in New Zealand and received some UK Government funding for a pilot project in England. The Gatsby Mathematics Project used in Barking and Dagenham is based on a system followed in Swiss primary schools. Furthermore, several study visits have been made by HMI, for example to Hungary, the Czech Republic and Holland, and a review of international surveys of educational achievement was commissioned by OFSTED from David Reynolds and Shaun Farrell.[7]

Reynolds and Farrell acknowledged the difficulties in making international comparisons. It is not easy to compare the performance in different countries of similarly aged pupils in the same skills, bodies of knowledge or tests. It is also not easy to disentangle the relative impact of a range of non-educational influences on the achievement of pupils: social, cultural, economic and familial factors are of major importance in explaining performance. Reynolds and Farrell focused on mathematics and science, subjects on which wider, cultural influences might be assumed to be least marked. They concluded that the educational systems of different societies are key factors in determining their educational achievement. For England, the comparative studies suggest[8] that:

- performance in science is rather better than that in mathematics;
- overall performance in mathematics in England is relatively weak, with strengths in data handling and geometry, and considerable weaknesses in arithmetic and number operations;
- this performance deteriorated relative to other countries between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s;
- English children show a very wide range of achievement, with a greater proportion of low-achieving pupils than many of our economic counterparts.

Despite all the problems of comparability, the conclusion remains that the performance of English children, at the ages of nine and thirteen in important aspects of the core subjects, excluding science, is disappointing when compared with that of children of the same age in many other countries, particularly some on the Pacific Rim (China, Korea, Taiwan) but also some closer to home (Switzerland, the former USSR, Hungary).

It is also a feature of the English system that formal education, including the teaching of computation, reading and writing, starts earlier than in most other societies, and that English students spend longer in compulsory schooling than is often the case elsewhere.

Evidence from this review of international surveys is supported by the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)[9]of pupil performance, which again points to long-standing weaknesses in the performance of English nine- and thirteen-year-olds, particularly in number. This growing weight of evidence has been to a large extent behind the increased focus on numeracy, underpinned by, for example, surveys such as The Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban LEAs[10] by

HMI.

Inevitably much debate has been prompted by such international comparisons, seeking answers to questions such as:

- what are the reasons for the superior performance of Pacific Rim countries?
- what are the reasons for the superior performance of certain European countries as against England?
- what are the reasons for poor performance that relate to the nature of the English educational system?

It is widely agreed that there are a variety of factors responsible for the high achievement scores of Pacific Rim pupils. Among the cultural factors suggested are the high status of teachers, the emphasis on effort and working hard, the high aspirations of parents for their children, the high calibre of newly trained teachers and the high level of commitment from children keen to do well.

Among the **systemic** factors thought to be important are the higher quantities of school time (for example, the school years in Korea and Taiwan have 222 days, compared with 190 in England); greater emphasis on homework; the prevalent belief that all children are able to acquire certain core skills in core subjects, and that there should be no "trailing edge" of low-performing pupils; and a concentration on a small number of attainable academic goals.

Important **school** factors are the use of mixed-ability classes in the early years at school ("basic skills in an egalitarian setting"[11]); the use of specialist teachers; the possibility of teachers working collaboratively with each other, frequent testing of students' skills in core subjects; and direct quality monitoring of the work of the teachers by the principal.

Key **classroom** factors include mechanisms to ensure that things are taught thoroughly and learned first time round; the use of the same textbooks by all children, channelling teachers' energies into classroom instruction and the marking of homework; and a "well ordered rhythm to the school day",[12] with frequent breaks and well managed lessons.

While some of the factors described above have been outside the immediate control of those responsible for shaping educational policy and practice, some are not. It is relatively easy to learn from school and classroom practice, and visits by educationalists including HMI to observe successful practice in some European countries are influencing developments such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. For example, from Switzerland[13] is noted the high proportion of high-quality, interactive, whole-class teaching; the use of textbooks linked to substantial teachers' manuals; the coherent planning of work; and a concentration in primary schools upon basic number work. From Hungary[14] is noted more formal classroom teaching, with more teacher direction, and more whole-class interactive instruction; high expectations and greater lesson pace; and national guidelines that expect teachers to move to advanced topics quickly.

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6 *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1996.

7 Reynolds, D and Farrell, S (1996) *Worlds Apart? A review of international surveys of educational achievement involving England*. London: HMSO

8 Mathematical studies:
1964 *The IEA First International Mathematical Study* (FIMS)
198283 *The IEA Second International Mathematics Study* (SIMS)
1988 *The IAEP First International Assessment of Mathematics* (IAEPM 1)
1990 *The IAEP Second International Assessment of Mathematics* (IAEPM 2)

Science studies:
197072 *The IEA First International Science Study* (FISS)
198385 *The IEA Second International Science Study* (SISS)
1988 *The IAEP First International Assessment of Science* (IAEPS 1)
1990 *The IAEP Second International Assessment of Science* (IAEPS 2)

9 *Third International Mathematics and Science Study*. NFER, 1996 and 1997.

10*The Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban LEAs*. OFSTED, 1997.

11 Reynolds and Farrell, ibid, p 55.

12 Reynolds and Farrell, ibid, p 55.

13 Bierhoff, H J, (1996) *Laying the Foundation of Numeracy: A Comparison of Primary School Textbooks in Britain, Germany and Switzerland*. London: National Institute for Economic and Social Research.

14 Burghes, D, "Britain gets a minus in maths", *Sunday Times*, 14 May 1995.

Chapter 4
THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

4.1 The quality and impact of teaching

Since the Education Reform Act 1988, primary schools have had to respond to a climate that has become far more focused on outcomes in terms of pupil achievement than ever before. The present Government's "standards agenda" has strongly reinforced the need to combat underachievement. Inspection findings for primary schools over the last four years clearly show that the most important input within the control of the school for promoting high achievement is the quality of the teaching. Indeed, the fact that the vast majority of that teaching for a given class is in the hands of one teacher for all or nearly all of a school year places a considerable responsibility upon the primary school class teacher.

Good teaching in primary schools makes a very significant difference. For example, in schools with the lowest proportion of good teaching, about 10 per cent fewer pupils reached Level 4 compared with pupils in a matched sample of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances and an above-average proportion of good teaching.

The 1978 report[15] contrasted "traditional" with "progressive", and "formal" with "informal" styles of teaching. Teaching styles were defined as either "mainly didactic" or "mainly exploratory". By 1994 the task of the primary school classroom teacher had been redefined, driven largely by the implementation of the subject-based National Curriculum. The curriculum had been defined in terms of the content, skills and concepts to be learned and taught, the National Curriculum being a common curriculum for everyone, "from Penrith to Penzance" in the words of the then Secretary of State. The consequences have been demanding of teachers' time and expertise and have led to an increased emphasis on planning, to ensure that the specified programmes of study are covered; an increased focus on separate subjects rather than topics which encompass elements of several subjects; greater precision to assessment; and a greater willingness to consider what form of teaching is likely to be the most appropriate for a given objective or group of pupils.

The language used to describe teaching has changed too. There are now fewer references to the "exploratory work" and "extended studies" arising from "spontaneous incidents", which featured in inspection reports of 20 years ago. Inspection reports now make explicit references to features of teaching such as "demonstration" and "instruction". The curriculum is quite clearly now being "taught". This, in turn, has raised the importance of considering how a subject is best taught, reinforcing the crucial role of effective teaching in achieving high standards across a broad and balanced curriculum.

Since the publication of the first Handbook for the Inspection of Schools[16] the central importance of teachers and their teaching has been recognised, and the criteria which summarise the key components of the quality of teaching have been defined and published:

> *Teaching quality is to be judged by whether clear goals are set for the group and for individuals, by the extent to which activities are well-planned and presented in a range of ways, have suitable content, and engage and motivate all pupils enabling them to make progress at an appropriate pace, and by the extent of arrangements to improve teaching quality.*[17]

The guidance provided in the first inspection Handbook set out the evaluation criteria, amplified to illustrate features of good and unsatisfactory teaching. Good teaching was described in these terms:

> *Where teaching is good pupils acquire knowledge, skills and understanding progressively and at a good pace. The lessons have clear aims and purposes. They cater appropriately for the learning of pupils of differing abilities and interests, and ensure the full participation of all. The teaching methods suit the topic or subject as well as the pupils; the conduct of the lessons signals high expectations of all pupils and sets high but attainable challenges. There is regular feedback which helps pupils to make progress, both through thoughtful marking and discussion of work with pupils. Relationships are positive and promote pupils' motivation. National Curriculum attainment targets and programmes of study are taken fully into account.*

Where appropriate, homework which extends or complements the work done in lessons, is set regularly.[18]

The current Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools[19] is even more clear in its emphasis on the importance of teaching:

Teaching is the major factor contributing to pupils' attainment, progress and response. Evaluation of the quality and impact of teaching is central to inspection.[20]

The Handbook requires inspectors to judge[21] the extent to which teachers:

- have a secure knowledge and understanding of the subjects or areas that they teach;
- set high expectations so as to challenge pupils and deepen the pupils' knowledge and understanding;
- plan effectively;
- employ methods and organisational strategies which match curricular objectives and the needs of all pupils;
- manage pupils well and achieve high standards of discipline;
- use time and resources effectively;
- assess pupils' work thoroughly and constructively, and use assessments to inform teaching;
- use homework effectively to reinforce and/or extend what is learned in school.

4.2 The quality of teaching: inspection evidence

Notwithstanding changes to the grading system and adjustments to the evaluation criteria, it is clear that over the four years of the inspection programme the quality of teaching has improved. In 1994/95, in around two in five lessons the teaching was good or very good, in two in five lessons the teaching was sound, and in one in five lessons the teaching was unsatisfactory or poor. Teaching was poorer in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1, and the weakest teaching of all was in Years 3 and 4, where 22 per cent of the teaching was unsatisfactory.

Chart 21 shows that by 1997/98 the picture had changed; the proportion of good teaching had risen at Key Stage 2 to over one-half (53 per cent) and that of unsatisfactory teaching had fallen to one in 14 primary schools (7 per cent). This improvement is striking: nevertheless, the figures suggest that there are still over a quarter of a million pupils in schools where the teaching is unsatisfactory, and around two million pupils in schools where the teaching is no better than sound. Given that the Government's targets for English and mathematics for 2002 are demanding and that most schools have some way to go before these are met, it is clear that there can be no relaxation in the drive to raise standards by improving the quality of teaching. It is unlikely that the "sound" teaching seen in many schools will be sufficient to enable them to achieve the ambitious targets which have been set.

Chart 21 : Teaching in primary schools 1996/97 and 1997/98

The quality of teaching in subjects

Charts 22 and 23 illustrate that the overall improvement in the quality of teaching applies to the teaching of almost all subjects.

For the first time, in 1997/98 the quality of the teaching of the three core subjects was better than the teaching of any other subjects, and the quality of the teaching of English and mathematics was better than that of science, at both key stages. The teaching of English and mathematics is now good in just over half the schools at Key Stage 2. This reflects a significant improvement since 1994/95, when the teaching of mathematics and English was good in only just over one-third of schools and was poor in one in five schools.

Several other features stand out. First, despite a general concern being voiced about the teaching of the arts and physical education in state schools, the quality of the teaching of music, art and physical education is very rarely weak and is better

than the teaching of geography, history and religious education. Second, the quality of the teaching of religious education has improved over the four-year period, assisted considerably by the new style of Agreed Syllabus, recognisably in line in many cases with the format of the National Curriculum, with attainment targets and levels to be achieved. Third, the teaching of technology, whether design and technology or information technology, remains weaker than any other subject. If anything, the quality of the teaching of technology is deteriorating. In many schools other priorities are seen as more pressing, or the demands of increasingly sophisticated technology overwhelm or are ignored by teachers without sufficient training and support in the subject.

Chart 22 : Quality of teaching by subject: 1994/95

Chart 23 : Quality of teaching by subject: 1997/98

The quality of teaching by year group

Charts 24 and 25 illustrate that the four-year period has seen not only an improvement in the teaching of most subjects, but also an improvement within all year groups. The proportion of poor teaching has fallen throughout primary schools and the proportion of good teaching has risen. The best teaching is reported, throughout the period, in nursery classes and classes with reception-age pupils, and in Year 6. The weakest teaching remains in Years 3 and 4, although the percentage of weak lessons seen in these year groups has halved.

Chart 24 : Quality of teaching by year group 1994/95

Chart 25 : Quality of teaching by year group 1997/98

The quality of the teaching of newly qualified teachers

Chart 26 shows the difference between qualified teachers who have taught for more than one year and newly qualified teachers. As expected, more experienced teachers teach better than newly qualified teachers. The gap in performance is similar across all subjects and encouragingly small.

Chart 26 : Quality of teaching in primary schools: qualified teachers with more than one year's experience and newly qualified teachers

4.3 The teaching of minority ethnic pupils[22]

Annual Reports over the past four years have generally reported positively on the provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language, and on the impact of the extra support provided under Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. For example, from 1996/97:

> *When Section 11 staff are well deployed they have an important and positive impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The work of bilingual assistants and teachers continues to be greatly valued by schools, especially in three areas: the support of young or early stage learners of English; the improvement of home/school relationships; and the advice they can give in the investigation of bilingual pupils thought to have special educational needs.*

Most schools are engaged in a wide range of initiatives to improve provision and raise attainment, but few monitor the impact of these activities systematically and rarely do they have a specific ethnic focus. Most schools have equal opportunities policies and, especially in inner-city schools, policies on education for diversity. There is, however, too much variation in the way they are implemented and how they influence the work of the school. Sound intentions are not always translated into effective day-to-day practice. Saying that prejudice is unacceptable is not helpful unless it is backed up by agreed procedures for dealing with racist behaviour. Schools with Gypsy Traveller or Pakistani pupils seem particularly slow to underpin policies with systems to translate them into action.

In order to identify underachievement, diagnose need and take action, schools need accurate information about aspects of pupils' performance. Very few primary schools currently make effective use of the increasing amounts of data available to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. Understandably, there is some fear of reducing expectations held by teachers of pupils of some ethnic minority groups; there are also some difficulties in establishing appropriate ethnic group categories.

Increasingly, local education authorities are providing their schools with an analysis of their National Curriculum assessment results, but the nature of this analysis varies considerably, with only a minority (mostly in urban and metropolitan areas)

including ethnic data. Even where schools do receive good-quality data analysed by ethnicity, few make constructive use of it. There is a need for further training and guidance on how to analyse and respond to such information.

A majority of schools, when pressed to comment on the attainment of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, rely on "hunches" or "general impressions"; when tested, however, these were sometimes proved wrong and revealed the presence of unhelpful stereotypes.

At a time of considerable educational change, involving for many schools a change of approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, many primary schools are implementing strategies designed to raise the attainment of all pupils irrespective of their ethnicity. Schools will need to evaluate how effective these strategies are for particular groups of pupils, for example those with low or even non-existent levels of spoken English. They will need to consider with even more care than in the past how to deploy their specialist bilingual and Section 11 staff in order to make the most effective use of their skills.

Three important messages emerge from inspection evidence. First, there is a need to analyse data about attainment, attendance and behaviour and to respond precisely to the outcomes of the analysis; second, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for improving the attainment of different groups of pupils; and, third, given that the attainment of bilingual pupils is measurably improved when they have attained fluency in the English language, teaching pupils to be literate in English should be given the highest priority in all schools.

4.4 Taught time

The total teaching time per week varies markedly from school to school. This feature inevitably begs the question of what is the relationship between the amount of taught time and the quality and standards of pupils' work. The overall number of lesson hours is not prescribed, although guidance is given.[23] It is suggested that governing bodies of all maintained schools should take as a general rule to good practice:

- 21 hours for pupils aged five to seven;
- 23.5 hours for pupils aged eight to eleven.

Data provided by schools about the amount of taught time per week is not always based on immediately comparable data, as schools interpret the phrase "taught time" in a number of different ways. There is often uncertainty about what should be included or excluded in the statistics: for example, acts of worship, registration time, movement between classes, and so on.

Charts 27 and 28 show the extent of the variation in 1997/98. The charts suggest that almost one in five schools at Key Stage 1 and three-fifths of the schools at Key Stage 2 teach less than the suggested number of hours each week. There are signs, however, that for some pupils in some schools the length of the school day is being extended through regular homework and "homework clubs", after-school supported study and, in addition, summer schools.

Few schools have a clear rationale for the allocation of time to subjects. In a survey into taught time conducted by HMI,[24] only one in ten schools had attempted to prescribe how much time should be spent teaching each subject and none had monitored actual practice. It seems likely that schools will now be in a better position to report how time is allocated, assisted by the move to teach subjects discretely and the more precise identification of the time spent teaching literacy and numeracy.

In all of the primary schools surveyed, the reported time spent on teaching the core subjects averaged 57 per cent of the taught time, but varied from 40 per cent to 75 per cent. Schools found it particularly difficult to define how much time was spent teaching English; often they felt that much of the work in other subjects was contributing directly to progress in English. During Key Stage 2, two-thirds of schools spent between 4.5 and 6.0 hours on English; between 4.0 and 5.1 hours on mathematics; and between 2.6 and 3.6 hours on science.

The time spent on non-teaching activities varied considerably; on average, over two hours each week were spent on registration and movement around school. While time for this is clearly necessary, schools need to ensure that it is not excessive, since the opportunity costs are considerable and teachers feel under pressure to "fit in" all the subject requirements.

There is little clear relationship between the total amount of taught time and overall achievement in terms of test results in the core subjects; inspection evidence suggests that the critical factor is how effectively time is used within the school day. Where the amount of taught time was relatively low, however, schools were more likely to allocate insufficient time to some subjects and to have imbalances within and between subjects.

Despite inconclusive evidence about the relationship between the length of taught time and pupils' educational achievement, it is clear that an adequate amount of time for a given subject is a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing work of quality. It is equally clear that where taught time is well below the recommended minima, schools often give their pupils short change in terms of the breadth, depth and balance of the curriculum provided.

Chart 27 : Total teaching time per week for Key Stage 1 (1997/98)

Chart 28 : Total teaching time per week for Key Stage 2 (1997/98)

4.5 The characteristics of good teaching

The principal themes of this section are the characteristics of good teaching, the features of which are the most important variables within the control of a school. The current inspection Framework sets out the criteria by which teaching is to be judged. Chart 29 shows the overall strengths and weaknesses of the teaching at Key Stages 1 and 2, and the changes usually improvements over the last two years.

The changes are striking, particularly over the past two years. In overall terms there is now less poor teaching and more good teaching than in 1996/97. Teachers' planning has improved considerably, more so at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 1; expectations are higher; and there have also been considerable improvements in the management of pupils, in the choice of methods and organisation, and in the use of time and resources. Although still weak, teachers' day-to-day assessment and their use of homework have also improved, although there is a long way to go before these aspects of teaching are handled as competently as the rest.

In schools where the teaching is judged to be good or very good overall, it is clear that inspectors are making this judgement on the basis of a combination of strengths which together promote high standards. Typically, there is a consistently, high quality throughout the school. For example, **Wellesley First School** in Norwich:

Teaching is a strength of the school. It has several effective features:

- teachers and headteacher have high expectations;
- the whole staff plan the year's programme together. As a result their individual lesson planning benefits, helping to create a clear pattern of development and progress for the children;
- teachers assess their own teaching and the work of individual children in each lesson so they may plan future work better. They keep very good records of what children achieve. Effective assessment makes them aware of what the children know, understand and can already do;
- lessons have a clear structure, which the children understand and can follow;
- teachers have good knowledge in most subjects and support each other in subjects in which they feel less qualified;
- teachers explain very carefully to classroom assistants and volunteer adults what they are expected to do, especially in relation to children with special educational needs;
- teachers interact well with the children's learning and have good relationships with them;
- the whole school sets children the values and standards required and encourages effort in them.

Chart 29 : Quality of teaching 1996/97 and 1997/98: Key Stages 1 and 2

Subject knowledge

Teachers' subject knowledge is strongly associated with high standards of pupils' achievement. In virtually all of the lessons where standards are good or very good, teachers' subject knowledge is judged to be satisfactory or good. Where teachers have good subject knowledge, they are more confident in planning and implementing work, more skilled at asking relevant questions, providing explanations and using the National Curriculum programmes of study, and more successful in providing demanding work for the more able pupils. They also have a good range of analogies and alternatives for presenting and illustrating knowledge so that pupils can understand the content of the subject. Inspection evidence indicates that in over two-fifths of the unsatisfactory and in half of the poor lessons, teachers' weak knowledge of the subject is a significant factor in pupils' low attainment. In these lessons, the teachers often have only a limited familiarity with the programmes of study,

concentrate on the transmission of factual information and focus their work on too narrow a range of National Curriculum levels. In the worst examples, incorrect information is given to pupils.[25]

The issues of subject expertise, teaching roles and staff deployment were highlighted in *Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools*,[26] which proposed that every primary school should, in principle, have direct access to specialist expertise in all National Curriculum subjects and in religious education. It concluded that:

> *Primary teaching roles are currently too rigidly conceived and much greater flexibility in staff deployment is needed. We recommend the introduction of semi-specialist and specialist teaching to primary schools to strengthen the existing role of class teacher and consultant. There is a particular case for concentrating specialist teaching at the upper end of Key Stage 2.*

This does, of course, run counter to the deep-seated commitment in English primary schools to the "one teacher, one class" organisation in which the pastoral role and the security of continuous contact with a single teacher are given a very high priority.

The demands placed on primary school teachers, particularly at Key Stage 2, in teaching ten subjects[27] and religious education have been recognised and considered by inspectors throughout the four-year period. Primary school classes almost always contain pupils with a wide range of attainment and often have pupils from more than one year group. It is usual for attainment towards the end of Key Stage 2 to range over three or four National Curriculum levels in the core subjects and to cover work as high as Level 5 and sometimes Level 6. The class teacher in a primary school has to meet far wider curricular requirements than subject teachers in secondary schools, usually without the support structures of a subject department, and with much less non-contact time.

These pressures have been reported in each of the last four Annual Reports from HMCI, for example:

> *In over half of the schools, the teachers have a good command of the subjects they teach. The demands of subject knowledge do, however, become greater as pupils get older, and by Key Stage 2 teachers in one in eight schools have insufficient subject expertise, particularly in information technology, design and technology, mathematics, science and religious education. This prevents them from teaching key aspects of the subjects in sufficient depth.*[28]

> *A lack of subject knowledge often limits teachers' objectives and the challenge for pupils. Some teachers, for example, steer away from more complex topics in science in which abler pupils could flourish. In teaching geography there is sometimes a reluctance to organise investigations of features of the local area. In religious education, when the teacher lacks sufficient knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the major religions, work often fails to convey the significance of religious belief for everyday life.*[29]

Inspection has shown a steady improvement in teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. As Chart 30 illustrates, by 1997/98, while the proportion of primary schools in which subject knowledge was good remained at about one-half of the schools, subject knowledge was judged to be weak in around one in 20 schools.

Not surprisingly, teachers' knowledge and understanding varies from subject to subject; the extent of this is illustrated in Charts 31 and 32. Encouragingly, class teachers' subject knowledge of English, mathematics and science is at least satisfactory in most schools, although the preparatory training courses for the National Literacy Project revealed a considerable need for teachers to receive more training in the teaching of reading, particularly phonological awareness. Modern languages are frequently taught by teachers with good knowledge of the chosen language, but the sample is small. The weaknesses of subject knowledge in design and technology, and above all in information technology, stand out starkly: in only one in five primary schools is there good subject expertise in information technology at Key Stage 2; in Key Stage 1 the figure is even lower, at around one in six.

The case is strongly made, therefore, that the attainment of high standards by pupils requires teaching by teachers who have a good grasp of the subject itself, fully understand the requirements of the National Curriculum, and know how to teach the subject effectively. Two further elements of subject expertise play their part. First, in primary schools subject expertise is often acquired through personal effort, interest and enthusiasm, rather than studying for a formal qualification. Second, the best teaching brings with it more than just subject expertise. For example, it remains the case that there are some teachers with good academic qualifications in a subject (they "know their stuff") but fail to teach it well. In other words, subject knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient condition of good teaching. The most successful teachers have a contagious enthusiasm for their subject.

Schools secure good subject expertise in a range of ways. For example, they identify strengths and weaknesses and seek to support teachers with gaps in their subject expertise through in-service training. They provide curricular support through detailed schemes of work which help teachers to secure progression in a subject. They conduct an audit of staff expertise and make as much use as they can of new appointments to fill gaps in particular subjects. They also seek to make the best use of the expertise at their disposal.

Chart 30 : Teachers' knowledge and understanding, 1997/98

Chart 31 : Teachers' knowledge and understanding: KS1, 1997/98

Chart 32 : Teachers' knowledge and understanding: KS2, 1997/98

Using subject specialists to promote high standards at Key Stage 2

A feature of the last four years has been a growing recognition of the considerable professional expertise to which schools have access, and the development of a range of strategies to make use of this expertise. It has, however, been one thing to acknowledge the expertise available; it is another to make the best use of it. In 1996/97 HMI were asked to investigate how schools approach these issues;[30] some schools are clearly more successful than others in using specialist knowledge to promote high standards throughout the school rather than just in the class taught by the particular expert.

In summary, HMI found that

- the quality of the teaching of subject specialists was almost always better than that of non-specialists;
- features of the best teaching by specialists were a confident command of the subject, a driving pace to lessons and extremely ambitious and unusually high expectations, invariably met by pupils;
- the most successful approaches to using subject expertise involved a combination of direct subject teaching by a specialist, with strategies to enable the specialist to influence the work of the school as a whole;
- the most successful approaches were carefully managed and did not rely on ad hoc arrangements between staff;
- small schools were able to arrange for exchange of expertise with relative ease. They also recognised the telling impact which the use of a specialist could make in a short space of time;
- large schools were more likely to have teachers who did not have full-time class responsibilities, allowing for greater scope for deploying expertise; and they had greater access to a wider range of expertise;
- it was often the medium-sized schools, with around ten teachers, which found it most difficult to make effective use of subject specialists;
- the lack of non-contact time was the most significant constraint on the effective use of subject expertise in half the schools in the survey, no non-contact time at all was available for subject co-ordinators;
- the exchange of classes between teachers sometimes had an adverse effect, when pupils in the class of a skilled and sought-after subject specialist teacher suffered through receiving teaching of variable quality from other teachers.

There were notable exceptions, but the overall picture was disappointing and indicated a considerable underuse of talent: for example, physical education specialists limited in their contribution beyond their own class to some after-school games clubs; the theology graduate teaching religious education only to her own class; and teachers back from 20-day mathematics or science courses with little opportunity to influence practice in their subject beyond ordering and organising resources or writing guidelines.

Expectations

A recurrent theme of Annual Reports is that of the need to raise teachers' expectations. For example, from 1994/95:[31]

> *Teachers should expect more of their pupils in all key stages. They set the right pace and degree of challenge and motivation in only a little over half of schools. Intellectual challenge is commonly weak in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. In many primary schools, teachers' expectations decline through the key stages. In Key Stage 2 they are too low in over a half of schools. In design and technology, for example, pupils are rarely called upon to use knowledge and understanding from other subjects, including science.*

The technical vocabulary and design suggestions that Key Stage 2 pupils can deploy far exceed teachers' expectations.

There are signs that expectations are rising. Nevertheless, by 1997/98 expectations were high in only two schools in five and were poor in one school in six at Key Stage 2. The raising of expectations remains one of the key issues still to be addressed properly. HMI inspection of the National Literacy Project revealed that the Framework for the teaching of reading and writing was helping teachers to raise their sights:

In the vast majority of schools, the use of the Framework is producing a more consistent, whole-school approach to the planning and organisation of the Literacy Hour and has raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.[32]

Likewise, the National Numeracy Project has not only increased the enthusiasm that many teachers had for the teaching of mathematics, especially oral and mental work, but it also helped raise their expectations of what pupils could achieve.

Chart 33 : Teachers' expectations in primary schools 1996/97 and 1997/98

Good teachers set high expectations because they have a good knowledge of the subject they are teaching. They know how to plan sequences of work to a sufficient depth and how to match the content to what the pupils already know. Good teachers also make their expectations explicit. For example, in **Elliston Infant School**, Cleethorpes:

Teachers signal high expectations both of achievement and behaviour. They make it clear to the pupils what is expected of them, how much time is available and emphasise the importance of concentration on the task in hand.

The themes of pace and challenge run through inspection reports when the teaching is predominantly good. For example, **Kea County Primary School** in Truro:

In the best lessons the teachers have enthusiasm, a high expectation of the pupils and a good knowledge of the subject. In these lessons teachers use time very effectively and the emphasis is on pupils working hard but also having fun. Excellent lessons are well thought out and planning is clear, producing work that is interesting and purposeful. Pupils enjoy the quick pace and intellectual challenges of these lessons. In one particularly good science lesson in Key Stage 2, pupils made very good progress in designing their own experiments to measure the effects of exercise on heart rate and in their understanding of the reactions of the body. In many lessons there are good links to other subjects and pupils are challenged, extending their knowledge and understanding.

While the pace of work expected of the pupils is a common theme in inspection reports when the teaching is good, an important factor about the pace of a good lesson is that it is determined by the teachers and not the pupils. There is more to expectations than just the setting of a lively pace. Pace and intellectual challenge, moreover, are not the same thing. The two usually go together, however, and generally contribute to the sustaining of interest in a subject and to the good use of time.

A demanding and fast pace is the characteristic of challenge most frequently commented upon, but the most effective teachers are able to vary the pace and adapt it according to the requirements of the lesson and the response from the pupils. Good teachers are prepared to slow down the pace of lessons to allow for pupils to respond, but are not afraid to accelerate it, for example during a period of direct instruction. One lesson note commented: "teacher managed pace well, at times injecting dramatic speed and then slowing it down to give the pupils opportunities to reflect on video and discuss with partner".

Setting

One response of schools to the need to match work to levels of prior attainment has been to group pupils in sets for certain subjects. The grouping of pupils with similar attainment levels into sets is increasing. This is seen particularly in mathematics and English in Years 5 and 6. Setting reduces the range of attainment within a teaching group and consequently can help teachers to plan work more precisely and select appropriate teaching methods. Where inspectors refer to setting, their comments tend to be brief but in almost every case they are positive. For example, from **Christ Church CE Junior School**, Wolverhampton:

In Year 6 pupils are set, according to ability, for English and mathematics. Setting, together with further differentiation for each group, results in work being finely matched to challenge pupils of all ability levels, including those with special educational needs.

A radical solution to the questions of how to raise standards from an already high level has been taken at **Priory School**, Slough. The school serves an area of some social deprivation, including inner-city overspill. Standards are very high, well above average at both key stages, but the school believed there was scope for further improvement and brought in an external consultant to offer advice on what the school should do next. The developments have been radical, and have involved the use of setting and streaming, linked to the deployment of subject specialists throughout the school:[33]

> *From Key Stage 1 onwards the pupils are streamed according to attainment, and each class is set demanding academic targets. At Key Stage 1, with the exception of music which is taught by specialists throughout, the classes are taught all subjects by their class teacher. In Years 5 and 6, pupils work in mixed-ability classes for some subjects, but for the core subjects they are taught in attainment-related sets. The largest sets are the "top" sets, with the lower sets having smaller numbers. Extra staffing enables the three classes per year to be split into four sets for the core subjects.*
>
> *In the core subjects the top sets are taught by subject specialists. This enables the most able pupils to be taught by subject specialists who can handle not only the technical understanding required by the more complex programmes of study, but also can answer the challenging questions from these able groups. The quality of the teaching in these sets is very high. It is not unusual to see pupils working at Level 6.*
>
> *The school is frustrated but not overwhelmed by constraints. For example, it would like to extend the use of subject specialist teaching and setting to Years 3 and 4, and would like to tackle the teaching of history and geography in the same way as the core subjects.*

HMI conducted a survey of setting in primary schools in 1997/98.[34] This showed that the incidence of setting has been increasing, that most schools use setting in Years 5 and 6 only, and that the higher the number on roll, the more likely the school is to use setting in one or more year groups. It appears that about six out of ten schools at Key Stage 2 set for at least one subject, principally mathematics and English. Virtually all schools that set did so with the explicit intention of raising standards. Setting was regarded by most of the headteachers in the survey schools as a way of catering for the needs of all pupils. It was seen as a means of challenging the most able and moving them beyond the national expectation, as well as a way of providing smaller, more focused teaching groups for the least able. Setting was also popular with the teachers, because the narrower range of attainment in sets enabled them to focus more easily on specific learning objectives, better matched to the needs of their pupils, and allowing more direct teaching to be used.

The most common reasons for not setting were practical ones: the small size of the school; the uneven composition of year groups; and the lack of either spare accommodation or additional staff, both of which are necessary if extra sets are to be formed. Very few schools avoided setting because of ideological objections such as preferring to maintain the tradition of one teacher to one class, or to teach the core subjects through integrated topics.

A very large proportion of the schools inspected demonstrated a clear trend of rising standards for pupils of all abilities once the use of setting had become established. All but a handful of the schools visited by HMI achieved higher scores in national tests in setted subjects in 1997 than they did in 1996, and most headteachers ascribed a good deal of the credit for improvements in standards to setting. Setting does not, by itself, guarantee success in raising standards, nor can it compensate for poor teaching. Safeguards need to be built in to avoid low self-esteem and the negative labelling of pupils which can occur in lower sets.

Setting tended to polarise the quality of the teaching: it was frequently either very good or poor, depending on whether or not the teachers had taken advantage of the opportunity to engage in focused, direct teaching with pupils of similar attainment levels. Without these teaching strategies in setted lessons, the characteristics of weak teaching became more pronounced and the potential advantages of setting were not achieved.

The quality of teaching in mathematics and English was highest in the "top sets" in all age groups, reflecting the fact that upper sets were frequently taken by subject co-ordinators or specialists. In mathematics, the least effective teaching was seen in the lower sets, while in English and science the weakest teaching was found in middle sets where three or more sets had been formed. The relatively better quality of lower-set teaching in English compared with mathematics is consistent with the frequent deployment of the special educational needs co-ordinators to lower English sets.

Schools usually went to great length to avoid labelling pupils as either high or low attainers through the sets to which they were allocated. However, pupils were found almost invariably to have a very good idea of the relative ranking of the sets that they were in. Nevertheless, in discussion, the vast majority of the pupils saw advantages to setting, accepted the purpose and fairness of their allocation to a particular set and liked having more than one teacher. They saw this, towards the end of Key

Stage 2, as a good preparation for secondary school. Very few examples of either elitism or negative self-image were found, although evidence suggests that there were more boys than girls in lower sets, particularly in English.

HMI evidence, therefore, endorses the Government's view, set out in the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, that schools should not be wedded entirely to mixed-ability teaching and that setting "is worth considering in primary schools". Where teachers understand its potential and modify their teaching techniques accordingly, setting can be a very successful way of organising teaching groups; carefully implemented and properly managed, setting facilitates direct, whole-class teaching and provides a powerful lever for raising standards.

Planning and preparation

At the beginning of the four-year cycle, inadequate planning as a factor associated with weaker teaching was highlighted as a concern in the Annual Report. Since then, there have been improvements in teachers' planning and, although planning was still weak in one in five schools in 1996/97, in 1997/98 this proportion had fallen to one in seven schools.

Several factors seem likely to have contributed to this improvement in planning. First, the Handbook for Inspection sets out clearly the characteristics of good planning:[35]

> *Good planning means that the teaching in a lesson, or sequence of lessons has clear objectives for what pupils are to learn and how these objectives will be achieved.*

Second, increasingly schools are following schemes of work, either produced commercially or within the school, which set out progressively the objectives for subjects and which can be built directly into teachers' plans. Third, projects such as those for literacy and numeracy have been influential in setting out in some detail the objectives on a termly basis for each year group.

In the 10 per cent of primary schools with the highest percentage of good teaching, the good quality of the planning was a positive feature highlighted in every report. Where planning was most effective, it identified objectives (sometimes described as targets, aims or goals) for individual lessons. A feature of the best teaching was the sharing of the objectives by the teacher with the pupils; they knew what they were going to do and why. For example, **Morpeth County First School**, Northumberland:

> *There are many characteristics of the effective teaching, but the most significant is the sharing of the lesson aims and purposes with the children at the start of every lesson. This, together with a clear indication of how pupils could measure their own success within their learning, focuses teaching specifically on identified learning tasks and helps pupils to know what is expected of them.*

And **Fair Oak Junior School**, Hampshire:

> *The quality of the teachers' planning is good. Due attention is paid to the National Curriculum programmes of study and to religious education. A particular strength is the planning which takes place within year groups and in the subject groups which include teachers from all year groups. The teachers' objectives and high expectations are usually made very clear and they are shared with the pupils. The planning makes clear what resources will be needed and what the pupils are expected to do.*

There are increasing numbers of schools with **schemes of work** which set out for every subject what is to be taught to which year group at which point of the year. The following example is taken from the scheme of work for music, spring term, Year 6 at **Priory School**, Slough. It offers sufficient detail to show a teacher what objectives should be set, what National Curriculum links can be made, and what activities the pupils should actually undertake:

Objectives: by the end of Term 2 in Year 6 the children:

- will have continued to learn an instrument in a small group;
- will have listened to a variety of popular music composed in Britain from 1930 to the present day;
- will have continued to work with, and learn about, chords, keys and intervals;
- will have composed a tune for a song to be played over a chord sequence;
- will have continued to sing in a variety of groups focusing on learning to sight sing.

NC refs	Activities
1 a, b	1. Continue to work with instrumental teachers in small groups.
2 e, f, g	2. Focus on folk songs written in Great Britain, learn and sing the songs, perform some of them from memory and perform them with accompaniments from music and chord symbols.
3 a, b	3. Compose a melody for a set of words to an unknown folk song. The melody must fit to a chord sequence. Although the work is an individual task, it can be discussed in groups.
4 a, b, c,d, e, f	4. Rehearse the songs in groups and record them using staff notation and audio-visual equipment.
5 a, b, c, d, e, f, h	5. Listen to different performers' versions of a famous folk song, eg *Scarborough Fair*, and discuss the differences and similarities.
6 a, c, d, e	6. Listen to the original recordings of the words their compositions were based on, and discuss similarities and differences.
	7. Listen to a variety of popular music written in Great Britain from about 1930, starting with war songs and moving on to rock and roll, big band, jive, music from the 1960s and 1970s, punk and up to the 1980s and 1990s.
	8. Focus on the music of prominent groups from this time, for example Abba, The Beatles, Elvis and Queen.
	9. Study the effect electronic equipment has had on the popular music and learn how to use a keyboard.
	10. Continue to sing a variety of music and learn how to sight sing.

Most teachers prepare for most lessons well. A feature of the well organised primary classroom is the availability and accessibility of appropriate basic resources, the tools of everyday classroom life: papers, pens, pencils, crayons, scissors, glues and so on. Individual lessons are usually prepared well often a time-consuming task but one that can make all the difference to the quality of a lesson.

While many primary school teachers have made extensive use of published schemes for mathematics and aspects of English, there has been a general reticence about the use of textbooks on a regular basis, although with careful selection and imaginative use these can provide valuable and informed background material. There has, however, been a steady growth in recent years, supported by the increasing availability of photocopiers, of the use of worksheets. As with textbooks, these can play a useful role, but there are dangers: too often the tasks require little more than completing sentences or lists of words; storage of completed worksheets can be a problem; and, at worst, they can be little more than low-level holding activities contributing nothing to progress colouring-in exercises and wordsearches, for example.

Methods and organisation

Chart 34 : Methods and organisation in primary schools

In the last two years of the review period, inspectors reported a significant improvement in the selection by teachers of the most appropriate teaching methods (see Chart 34), and reports indicate that the feature which makes the most difference is the extent of **direct, whole-class teaching**. There is an assumption, however, that this appears to be something new. It is not. Good teachers have always recognised the place of good direct teaching and HMI have always commented on its impact and the need for its inclusion as part of the teacher's repertoire. On the other hand, a feature of much unsatisfactory teaching is the inability of the teacher to get the balance right between individual, group and whole-class work.

> *Some teachers did little or no direct teaching but acted largely as servicers or supervisors of the pupils' tasks... The most common organisational weaknesses stemmed from the teachers' failure to vary their favoured grouping strategies which resulted in too much, or too little, time spent on whole class teaching or on individual work or on group work.*[36]

Recognition of the value of good, direct whole-class teaching may not be new, but inspection and international comparisons indicate that there is, or has been, a reluctance in English primary schools to teach a whole class, and a preference for individual work or group activity in an attempt to meet perceived differences in pupils' rates of learning.

The National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy set out to build on the experiences of the literacy and numeracy projects, in which direct teaching to either the whole-class or to small groups was a key element of the methodology. The influence of the projects has spread beyond the project schools and local education authorities. Inspectors are already reporting the occurrence of more frequent, regular and sustained daily sessions of whole-class teaching, aimed

especially at raising standards of literacy and numeracy. In mathematics, for example, there is greater attention to the rapid and accurate recall of number facts and to the learning by heart of multiplication tables through whole-class methods. Daily sessions, brisk and sharply focused, in which number facts are taught, practised and used, are becoming more widespread.

Even before the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in September 1998, many primary schools had anticipated the strategy by introducing a daily **Literacy Hour** which required carefully planned and timed elements of direct teaching to the whole class, some group work with the teacher directly teaching one or two groups, and a closing plenary in which the teacher checks that what has been covered is understood and requires pupils to share their work with each other. For example, **Christ Church CE Junior School**, Wolverhampton:

> *In most lessons, whole class teaching is used effectively to introduce the lesson. In many lessons this introduction is stimulating and motivates pupils to make the appropriate links between previous learning and the work currently to be undertaken. Most lessons have a good structure, with opportunities for individual or collaborative work focused appropriately to specific abilities to maintain interest and ensure a brisk pace of learning. Review time at the end of the lesson is used well to check, consolidate and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.*

It is, however, very clear that teaching the class together for part of a lesson is not an easy option and requires a secure understanding by the teacher of what is to be taught, clear instructive teaching, skilled questioning and discussion if all pupils are to make consistent progress. Without these features in place, inspectors report overextended introductions to lessons and teachers spending far too long simply talking to the class.

Questioning

Skilled questioning is a key competence of the good teacher. Good questioning is at the heart of good whole-class teaching of pupils with a range of abilities, including pupils with special educational needs, EAL and very able pupils. It was, for example, identified as the most significant aspect (highlighted in 58 per cent of the good or very good lessons) of pedagogy by HMI in Primary Matters, essential to assessing pupils' knowledge and to challenging their thinking. For example, in the inspection survey of the Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban LEAs,[37]

> *Good teaching took place in just over a third of the lessons. In these lessons the pupils listened carefully as the teacher emphasised key aspects in the work and they responded eagerly when questioned or challenged to explain in their own words. In one lesson involving a class with a high proportion of pupils who were learning English as an additional language, the teacher began by teaching the whole class. They worked on the addition and subtraction of two numbers to make a sum or difference of 12. Pupils were encouraged to say what they thought would happen as the two numbers increased or decreased and to justify their answers "Why did you do that?" They willingly provided alternatives, and corrected errors, responding positively to the high expectations set for them.*

In schools in which the teaching was good or very good, questioning was the aspect of successful teaching most frequently mentioned. It is used by teachers for a number of reasons. The first is as a form of assessment, that is to test pupils' understanding of a subject. This is increasingly seen by teachers of the Literacy Hour as a part of the initial whole-class teaching; the teacher can use questions to gauge whether the whole class has understood a particular issue or instruction, and to pinpoint with individual pupils just what has been learned and what needs further work. Second, questioning helps teachers to reinforce learning. Third, it is used to develop and probe understanding, and to move pupils' minds and imaginations forward, often linked to an object or a story... "What do you think lies under the stone?"... "I wonder what we shall see when I turn the page." Finally, questioning can be used to encourage reticent or reluctant pupils to participate in lessons.

Management of pupils and discipline

The management of pupils and the achievement of high standards of discipline are at least satisfactory in the large majority of schools; in only one school in 20 were these aspects weak in 1997/98. Nevertheless, the impact of poor behaviour often by a small minority of pupils on the quality of the education within a school can be considerable; the poor behaviour of a few affects the learning of everyone. There are several examples of inspection reports in which this serious issue is spelt out quite clearly. For example,

> *There is a clear difference between the consistently good attitudes and behaviour of the under-fives and of the pupils at Key Stage 1, the mostly satisfactory behaviour seen in Years 3 and 4, and the frequently poor, unacceptable behaviour by a small minority of pupils in Years 5 and 6. This unruly behaviour, usually by two or three boys in the upper classes, has serious implications for the work of the school. It affects*

adversely the attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the other pupils, and often prevents learning from taking place. It also affects staff morale and is of great concern to parents.

An outcome of the introduction of the National Literacy or Numeracy Projects was a positive impact on the behaviour of the pupils and on their attitudes to their work. The vast majority of pupils responded well to the Literacy Hour with its familiar organisation and structure. In nearly nine lessons in ten, pupils from Reception to Year 6 applied themselves well and showed improved confidence and positive attitudes to their work. In general, the interest in reading and writing and levels of motivation were high. The structure of the Literacy Hour meant that pupils were clear about basic routines, particularly when undertaking group work, and this aided class control and promoted good behaviour. Where there were examples of pupils having negative attitudes to literacy, these were strongly associated with slow-paced teaching and ineffective classroom management, often resulting in boredom, disinterest and an inability to work independently.

It is easy to overlook that one of the essential preconditions of good teaching is the appropriate **organisation** of the classroom. Some of the most effective feedback to teachers from headteachers, inspectors and advisers has been related to classroom organisation. If there is to be whole-class teaching using a whiteboard, can everyone see the board easily? Are seating arrangements comfortable and do they ensure immediate eye contact with the teacher? What are the benefits of pupils sitting on a carpeted floor rather than on chairs at their tables? If a 'big book' is used, is the text large enough for everyone to read it? Can everyone hear the teacher?

The quality and use of day-to-day assessment

Chart 35 : Quality and use of day-to-day assessment in primary schools

It is difficult for teachers to gauge the level at which work should be set without a clear knowledge of what pupils already know. Primary schools cope rather better with the statutory requirements for assessment than the less formal day-to-day assessment of pupils. Although there has been some improvement in the use of day-to-day assessment, as illustrated in Chart 35, it is still a weakness in almost one-third of schools. Schools have quite understandably moved away from the huge quantity of checksheets and ticklists which characterised much of the early assessment work related to the National Curriculum, but they are much less clear about what should replace them. There is, however, a strong association between good teaching and good assessment.

Examples of good practice can be found. Often the school which is successful at its day-to-day assessment is one which is also successful in its more formal assessment arrangements; the distinction between formative and summative assessment fades in these schools. Even in schools with successful assessment approaches, the issue of an unacceptable workload, or one which does not yet justify the time and effort spent, remains. Note, for example, the final sentence of the "assessment" section of the report on **Ramsden Infant School**, Barrow-in-Furness:

Procedures for the assessment of work and progress are a strength of the school. There is a timetabled programme for review and assessment throughout the key stage, which is consistently used by all staff. This enables changes in pupils' attainments to be closely monitored and effective steps planned to meet specific needs. Targets are set and reviewed carefully within the set timespan. In their planning, teachers use information gathered very effectively to promote pupils' development. Records of progress and achievement are maintained in both the core and foundation subjects. The development plans in each subject indicate that strategies are in hand to address this, such as collecting moderated examples of pupils' work in portfolios. Record keeping is related to coverage of the programmes of study and there is a useful record of achievement.

Pupils' work is marked regularly and conscientiously. Pupils receive feedback during lessons orally and written in their books, including appropriate praise, encouragement and suggestions for improvement. Staff are consistent in advising pupils how they can improve their work and in expecting high standards. In English and mathematics there is consistency between teacher assessment and results of National Curriculum tests. The amount of work undertaken in assessment is considerable and the school has rightly planned to review and evaluate all assessment procedures.

An important feature of schools in which the implementation of the National Literacy Project was successful was the detailed assessment of what pupils knew, in order for the teacher to plan accurately a structured programme for the teaching of reading.

Homework

Only one-quarter of schools make good use of homework. Reading scheme books are taken home by pupils in most schools,

and many teachers ask pupils to learn and practise spellings and multiplication tables at home. However, practice is often inconsistent from one class to the next, and this is frequently raised as a concern by parents in their response to inspection questionnaires and at parents' meetings. In the completion of questionnaires prior to an OFSTED inspection, parents are more likely to express disquiet about homework than any other issue. In a recent scrutiny of over 1,500 primary schools from which data was obtained from parents' questionnaires, in just over half (51.42 per cent) of the schools parents registered a "significant" level of dissatisfaction with the homework that their child is expected to do.

A small but growing number of schools hold regular "homework clubs" after school. These schools are often in disadvantaged areas where some pupils find it hard to get the necessary support or facilities for working at home. Despite the voluntary nature of attendance at these sessions, schools have often been surprised at their popularity. Typically, a very good working atmosphere is established and pupils are able to continue with or complete work started in lessons, and receive extra help with areas in which they are having some difficulties. Year 6 pupils are sometimes given opportunities to revise issues likely to be encountered in the National Curriculum tests.

The place and value of homework have been debated widely in recent years, often in the context of concerns about the amount of time children spend watching television or playing computer games rather than reading or doing "school work". The Government's White Paper, *Excellence in Schools,* recognises the valuable role which well organised homework could play in raising standards, and proposed that national guidelines on homework should be drawn up for schools. A survey conducted by HMI[38] in 1994 concluded that:

- *where staff, pupils and parents treat it seriously, homework has the potential to raise standards, extend coverage of the curriculum, allow more effective use to be made of lesson times and improve pupils' study skills and attitudes to learning;*
- *in general, many pupils and their parents saw work done at home as a valuable and essential part of school work, and as helping to create a partnership between home and school;*
- *there was little systematic and regular monitoring of the implementation of homework policies by the schools and, consequently, there was little knowledge of their impact or effectiveness.*

Although, from the HMI survey quoted above, it is impossible to provide firm evidence of any improvement in standards, many teachers and parents believed that homework had a direct effect in enhancing pupils' knowledge and understanding. They felt that where the school had a well-devised and systematic homework policy, the attendant sense of purpose encouraged pupils to respond maturely. Most Year 6 pupils valued the opportunity to become accustomed to homework in preparation for entry to secondary school, which, they felt, would be "a much more demanding regime".[39]

4.6 The characteristics of schools with good teaching

Of the primary teachers observed by inspectors on five or more occasions during inspections in 1997/98, 67 per cent taught no lesson where the teaching was unsatisfactory and 50 per cent of teachers taught mostly good lessons. In other words, poor teachers are rare. There were only 3.2 per cent of teachers, equivalent to about 6,000 teachers, whose teaching was unsatisfactory in over half of the lessons observed.

It is exceedingly unusual for a school to have no good teaching. For example, of the 2,682 schools (primary and secondary) inspected in the academic year 1997/98, only one school was reported as having no examples of good teaching. Chart 36 shows the proportion of good teaching found in the schools inspected in 1997/98. In over half the schools inspected, over half of the teaching is good. In only 3 per cent of schools is less than one-quarter of the teaching good.

Chart 36 : the proportion of good teaching in the schools inspected in 1997/98

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15 *Primary Education in England, A Survey by HM Inspectors of Schools*. DES, 1978.

16 *Handbook for the Inspection of Schools*. OFSTED, 1992.

17 ibid, p 11.

18 ibid, Guidance, p 21.

19*The OFSTED Handbook. Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1995.

20 ibid, p 67.

21 ibid, p 66.

22 Much of the material in this section is taken from the HMI report, *Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils*. OFSTED, 1999.

23 DES Circular 7/90.

24*Taught Time*. OFSTED, 1994.

25*Primary Matters. A discussion on teaching and learning in primary schools*. OFSTED, 1994.

26 London, DES 1992.

27 On the advice of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (now Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), information technology and design and technology are now treated as separate subjects.

28*The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 1995/96*. OFSTED, 1997.

29*The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 1994/95*. OFSTED, 1996.

30 *Using Subject Specialists to Promote High Standards at Key Stage 2*. OFSTED, 1997.

31*Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 1994/95*. OFSTED, 1996.

32 *The National Literacy Project: an HMI evaluation*. OFSTED, 1998.

33*Using Subject Specialists to Promote High Standards at Key Stage 2*. OFSTED, 1997.

34*Setting in Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1998.

35*The OFSTED Handbook. Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1995, p 68.

36*Primary Matters*. OFSTED, 1994.

37*The Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban LEAs*. OFSTED, 1997, pp 19 and 20.

38*Homework in Primary and Secondary Schools*. OFSTED, 1995.

39 ibid, pp 9 and 10.

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Chapter 8
THE EDUCATION OF UNDER-FIVES

8.1 Standards of achievement and the quality of teaching

The Framework for Inspection requires inspectors to evaluate aspects of the education of pupils under five as follows:

> *For pupils under five, the report must contain an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses in attainment, pupils' attitudes, teaching and other provision across the areas of learning.*

The inspection of under-fives work covers a wide range of types of national provision and also takes account of the variable time that pupils may spend in designated "reception" classes. Inspection takes account of the work of mixed-age classes where under-fives and over-fives are in the same class, and the fact that some pupils who are still not five years old may well have moved from the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning[47] into the programmes of study of the National Curriculum.

Pupils made good or very good progress in about half the nursery sessions inspected. In less than one school in 20 is the progress of under-fives in nursery classes judged to be poor. Chart 49 illustrates that in the large majority of schools pupils make at least satisfactory progress towards achieving the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning, and that over the past two years the rate of progress made by pupils in reception classes has improved. Many pupils, particularly those entering school with low levels of attainment, make particularly good progress in their first year or so at school. However, in some schools there is a continued focus on the Desirable Outcomes, when pupils particularly the more able have already achieved them. For these pupils, more advanced knowledge and skills should be developed.

The quality of teaching in both nursery and reception classes was good in over 45 per cent of the lessons observed throughout the period, and considerable improvement is reported. Chart 50 illustrates this. Indeed, the greatest proportion of lessons in primary schools in which the teaching is good or very good has consistently been in nursery classes, closely followed by teaching in reception classes. Improvement has been particularly noted

in the development of more detailed curriculum planning and greater co-operation between classes with the same year groups. This helps address the issue of inconsistency of practice and provision within a school, one of the concerns raised in one in eight schools with under-fives provision in 1994/95. The establishment of the Desirable Outcomes has helped clarify the nature of the early years curriculum for many teachers, and this has led to a greater consistency in planning.

However, the quality of the teaching of under-fives has been a cause for concern in a significant number of small schools (with less than 100 pupils). Many teachers find it hard to set work of appropriate challenge and range for a class in which there are under-fives working towards the Desirable Learning Outcomes and older pupils who are being taught the programmes of study of the National Curriculum. The provision is more likely to be weak in those classes where there are only a few pupils under five. There is a danger that these pupils are either moved on too quickly towards National Curriculum work or given an insufficiently structured early-years experience. Inspection reports on small schools frequently include reference to the variation in the quality of the provision for the youngest pupils in such schools, but there are signs that the issue is being addressed by an increased provision of teaching assistants for these pupils, which is particularly effective when the assistant has NNEB training.

Good use of teaching assistants is a consistent feature of effective under-fives provision, especially since 1995. There has been an increased emphasis on the provision of training for teaching assistants in nurseries and on the careful deployment of all available adults. For example, at the **Margaret McMillan Nursery** in Islington:

> *All staff including teachers, nursery nurses and assistants build on their existing skills, knowledge and understanding to enable them successfully to further the children's learning in the areas of the curriculum*

and promote the values of the school. There is a very strong sense of community, and all the staff work well together and share responsibilities. Their consistency of approach makes a significant contribution to the good standards of attainment and of behaviour.

To provide the well planned and structured staff training and in-service training programme, use is made of the good expertise available at the school. The commitment to staff development is a significant strength, and this is evident in the very good quality of the provision and teaching.

A significant development has been the improvement in the balance between under-fives work directed by the teacher and that undertaken within free or guided choice by the pupils. This is an interesting development in the light of the current debate about the nature of early years education. Again, the improvement in planning and the use of the Desirable Outcomes may be supporting the trend towards a more appropriate balance between direct teaching and free play.

Planning has improved in its thoroughness and consistency over the four years of the review period. Daily planning is generally better than longer-term planning, but in more than one in ten of nursery classes insufficient attention is given to the setting of objectives in the plans. On the other hand, there has been a significant reduction in practical activities which lack a clearly specified purpose. Where the purpose of activities is clearly established and children's work given more structure, teachers achieve a closer match between the work and pupils' abilities.

The quality and use of assessment has also improved over time. The range of assessment procedures has grown and teachers are increasingly skilled in techniques of observation. But a feature of the reports on the most sophisticated and successful assessment methodologies is usually a comment about the demands they place on busy teachers. For example, **Merrivale Nursery School**, Nottingham:

The assessment, recording and reporting arrangements are excellent. The school uses an effective range of techniques and recording systems in order to assess accurately the progress of individual children. Assessment is firmly rooted in sound observation techniques, whereby three children each session are closely observed by staff. In this way all children are assessed over a period of two weeks. These observations cover academic success, social interaction and behaviour.

The staff come together eight times a week to discuss and record these observations, which are transferred to the children's records and are central to the assessment, recording and reporting system. Two members of staff also focus on a particular activity each day in order to make detailed observations of both children and tasks. Information about the children's involvement in specific tasks is marked on checklists so that staff can be sure that all children have been actively involved in all aspects of the curriculum. In addition to this, the school uses other appropriate assessment procedures. These include a baseline assessment and a special folder in which work worthy of note is selected by both staff and children. These are collected and compiled into a book which the children take with them when they leave.

The school also uses procedures, for example the "pride vine", which is a large display of records of achievement. The school records and displays the academic, physical or social activities a child is working towards... The assessment, recording and reporting systems used by the school are valuable but demand a great deal of time from the staff.

Baseline assessment has developed throughout the four years of the review period. About one in eight reports referred to its use in 1994/95, compared with half of the reports in 1997/98. The introduction of baseline assessment is helping schools to focus more sharply on starting points, against which progress can be measured and planned. For example, in 1997/98, the limited language skills of pupils on entry were reported in two in five schools as a cause for concern.

The overall picture of the quality of teaching, planning and assessment is one of developing detail and rigour, with an increased focus on identifying the strengths and weaknesses in individual pupils' performance.

Chart 49 : Progress by pupils under five, 1996/97 and 1997/98

Chart 50 : The quality of teaching in reception and nursery classes

8.2 The curriculum

Reporting on trends across the four years of the inspection cycle has to take account of the introduction of the Desirable

Learning Outcomes in 1996. The curriculum for the under-fives has been carefully developed by many schools during the four years. The use of the Desirable Outcomes has provided a clearer focus for work, which, together with improved planning and assessment, has produced a more rigorous view of what knowledge and skills children should develop and how this is to be done. Remaining weaknesses include the slow pace of work in a small minority of classes, a feature much more frequently mentioned than work being too demanding of the under-fives. Where excessively demanding work for the youngest pupils is noted, it is almost always in those classes which include older pupils as well as reception-age pupils. Inspectors very rarely report that pupils are being pushed too early into the National Curriculum or that they are being given unduly "formal" work.

Provision for pupils' **personal and social development** is a major priority and a considerable strength of the work of most schools. Schools place a high priority on the promotion of a positive attitude to learning, good behaviour and a lengthening concentration span. Schools are particularly successful at helping young children settle to the routines of school life. This is a wide-reaching aspect of the inspection of nursery classes and schools, and is often reported on most clearly in the section on attitudes, behaviour and personal development. For example, at the **Dorothy Gardner Centre**, Westminster:

> *The nursery is a hive of activity. Children often initiate their own activities and are able to sustain concentration for long periods. During role play in the construction area and in the home corner, they initiate lengthy sequences of events, including rescues from top-storey fires and cures for hospital-bed ailments. Children are responsible for the tasks they set themselves, but readily request help when needed. They respect property and tidy up after themselves. They appear happy, and on the few occasions a child is in distress, staff quickly resolve the problem.*
>
> *Children celebrate a range of religious and cultural festivals. Visiting the Hindu temple during the celebration of Divali, they experience feelings of wonder at the majesty of the building and a sense of awe by being present during a ceremony.*

Standards in **language and literacy** (formerly reported under English) have risen throughout the period of the first inspection cycle, and they were at least satisfactory in 85 per cent of schools by 1997/98. The proportion of schools with good achievement in language and literacy rose from 16 per cent to 28 per cent during the four years of the review period. Nevertheless, there are overall weaknesses in language and literacy in one in eight schools.

The quality and range of provision for language work in a school with good practice in this area is illustrated in the report on **Strong Close Nursery School**, Keighley:

> *A high priority is given to the language and literacy area of learning. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, are achieving levels at least appropriate to their abilities, with many achieving levels which are high. Teaching takes account of those pupils for whom English is a second language; dual language texts and materials are provided, and this enables pupils to make good progress.*
>
> *In both small and large groups, pupils listen attentively, talk about their experiences and confidently share ideas. They listen well to stories, songs, nursery rhymes and poems and respond enthusiastically when questioned about them. Most have learned some songs and rhymes by heart and many are confident in reciting these to others in the group. Pupils demonstrate an increasing awareness of a wider range of vocabulary in many areas of learning. They follow instructions and verbal directions effectively and show by their responses that they have understood key words and ideas.*
>
> *Pupils enjoy books and handle them appropriately, particularly some of the tiny "pop-up" books which require great care. They generally realise how books are organised and most systematically turn pages correctly from the beginning of the story, making relevant comments as they move through the text. Most know that pictures carry meaning and many demonstrate an understanding that print also carries meaning. Many recognise their own names and sometimes they recognise their friends' names. Pupils are beginning to recognise letters of the alphabet by both the shape and sound and a few are beginning to apply this knowledge when reading.*
>
> *Pupils' understanding of the writing process is developing well. They show awareness of the different purposes of writing and often communicate their learning using pictures, symbols and some familiar words and letters. Most are developing appropriate control of pencils and pens. A significant number of pupils can write their own names with a reasonable level of accuracy.*

The development of speaking and listening skills has been given high attention, although many schools need to promote more intensively a broadening of children's vocabulary. The vast majority of pupils engage in early reading and writing activities,

which include some elements of phonic work, letter recognition, reading familiar words and name writing. On the whole, however, this aspect of the programme is less systematic than it needs to be.

The range of **mathematics** seen in schools with good practice is summarised, for example, in the report on **Clervaux Terrace Nursery School**, Jarrow:

> *Pupils achieve high standards in the wide range of mathematical experiences which are provided in the nursery. They make good use of the many opportunities to investigate and learn about number in activities such as number songs, in the sorting and matching of objects, and in a wide range of counting and ordering tasks which are an integral feature of the school day. Even at snack time, pupils are keen to count out fruits or crisps and to compare their sizes. Pupils have a very good knowledge of space and shape. They learn to make patterns and can use correct mathematical language to describe them.*

The great majority of schools teach children to recognise and write numbers and to count, recognise mathematical shapes and use simple mathematical terms to describe shape, position, size and quantities. Shopping activities usually form part of an early mathematics programme, but pupils are not always taught the necessary skills to enable them to succeed.

Knowledge and understanding of the world is the broadest of the six areas of learning, and involves early historical, geographical, environmental, scientific and technological learning. Many schools find it hard to cover the full range satisfactorily and it is the area in which the fewest schools secure good provision and response. Most schools tackle this area by integrating the various strands into a topic such as "homes", and often use visits to local places of interest to back up work undertaken in class.

Creative development receives a high priority in most under-fives classes and is at least satisfactory in over nine in ten schools. Art and music are generally well developed. **Physical development** is generally well promoted in terms of developing children's co-ordination and movement skills through using tools and a range of materials requiring increasingly complex manipulative skills. Weaknesses are usually a result of restrictions on space and equipment, either indoors with climbing apparatus, or outdoors where space may be limited or non-existent. Schools with cramped or unsatisfactory accommodation often take imaginative steps to overcome these difficulties and cope despite the problems. Nevertheless, the gap between the good and poor provision for physical development is very wide.

The absence of policies for some curriculum areas (or subjects) was a feature of about two in five schools for the first three years of the present period. This is a particular cause for concern when core areas such as mathematics and language and literacy are involved. Although the proportion fell to one in five in 1997/98, it is still too high.

The provision of a "broad and balanced" curriculum for under-fives has been increasingly observed over the four years. In the best examples, schools are clearly making decisions about the balance of the curriculum in the light of their assessment of the needs of their pupils. For example, at **Powers Hall County Infant School**, Witham:

> *Pupils' attainment on entry to the nursery and early years classes is often below expectations for the age group... The early years curriculum places an appropriate and necessary emphasis on developing the children's skills in language and literacy, and mathematics, and on their personal and social development.*

8.3 Partnership with parents

The partnership between schools and the parents of the youngest children is strong in the great majority of schools. Parents are generally welcomed into nursery and reception classes at the start of a session, and are encouraged to take an interest in their children's progress, the work being undertaken, and to discuss any problems with the teacher. This is usually backed up by newsletters and noticeboards, and many schools provide written or photographic explanations of the purposes of the various activities provided, indicating to parents how they can help their children at home.

Inspectors have increasingly raised concerns about the number of children arriving late for the start of sessions in early years classes. While attendance is not compulsory before statutory school age, the disruptive impact of late arrivals is significant. Late arrivals in the year when many schools first admitted younger four-year-olds, or "rising fours", when the nursery voucher scheme was introduced nationally, has presented many schools with an issue that they are addressing but which is still not resolved.

8.4 Issues

In the last year of this four-year period, changes in government policy had the potential to affect previous practices significantly. The introduction of early years development plans and the associated partnerships to match provision with need across the range of pre-school services, came too late to have an impact on inspection reports. Similarly, it is too early to report on the impact of the support given to integrated child-care and education services, notably through the Early Excellence Centre programme.

However, by the end of the inspection year 1997/98, some references were beginning to be made to the implementation of a "literacy hour", and to a lesser extent a mathematics lesson, for pupils towards the end of their reception year. The few comments made were positive and referred to the appropriately and sensitively staged introduction of such work with young children. Other early signs are of materials such as "big books" being used for story sessions in younger reception and some nursery classes as a means of very gradually introducing the literacy resources and practices used elsewhere in the school. From the evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Projects, there was no evidence of the literacy hour or numeracy lesson being introduced too rapidly in reception classes during the pilot stage of these schemes.

Particular challenges exist when reception-age pupils are taught in mixed-age classes with older pupils, especially in small schools or schools where teaching support is limited. The issue has been resolved to some extent by the introduction of the Desirable Learning Outcomes, which have helped teachers of such classes by distinguishing between the curriculum appropriate to children under five and those over five who are engaged on the programmes of study of the National Curriculum. It is proving to be less of a problem in language and mathematical work than in knowledge and understanding of the world, where scientific work across mixed age groups is most commonly noted as a problem.

Improvements in planning, especially since the advent of the Desirable Learning Outcomes, are significant. Yet there remains a number of schools where policies, schemes of work and overall planning have significant gaps for example, where subjects or areas lack relevant schemes of work. In 1997/98, one in five schools with early years provision had insufficient or inadequate documentation to support the curriculum for under-fives.

8.5 Section 5 inspections

During the 1994-98 period, Section 5 nursery voucher (later nursery grant) inspections were established. These nursery inspections covered non-local education authority provision operated by providers in the private, independent, voluntary and social services sectors. After a pilot phase in four local education authorities (Norfolk, Westminster, Wandsworth, and Kensington and Chelsea) in 1996/97, the scheme was launched nationally in 1997. The Section 5 inspections use a different inspection framework and process from that of Section 10 inspections of local education authority provision, and the findings of the two approaches cannot be compared statistically. Section 5 inspections assess how far the nursery's programme promotes the Desirable Outcomes, has weaknesses or is poor. It is a judgement on whether pupils are likely to have achieved the Desirable Outcomes by the age of five. By contrast, Section 10 inspectors judge the current achievements of the pupils in relation to the Desirable Outcomes or to the National Curriculum if this is considered appropriate.

Over the period of this review there has been a determined effort by the Government to provide non-statutory nursery places for all children from the age of four. More recently, the Government has announced a programme of expansion of non-statutory nursery education to include places for three-year-olds. In step with these developments, and at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, OFSTED has inspected the quality of provision in all publicly funded pre-school settings for four-year-olds in primary school reception classes.[48] Inspection has taken full account of a key condition of funding, notably that all these settings should promote the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning.

An emerging issue in several schools and other institutions is the growth in services for parents and pre-school children which are not subject to OFSTED inspection and yet which significantly extend the provision for example, adult education (often informally organised), parent and toddler groups, "drop-in" services, before- and after-school clubs, and other services. These can have a major impact both on the education provision for the children and on links with the wider community.

Given the diversity of settings receiving funding, it is not surprising that some have found it easier to meet the requirements of the funding than others. Table 1 shows how well the various types of setting promote the Desirable Outcomes for Learning.

Across all types of setting, moreover, some of the areas of learning have proved more difficult to promote than others. Table 2 shows in rank order the areas of learning where the promotion of the Desirable Outcomes was secure, across all institutions.

Despite a great deal of debate about what should constitute an appropriate curriculum for early years education and how it should be taught, the introduction of the Desirable Outcomes for Learning has undoubtedly helped providers in at least two

ways. It has helped them to plan and prepare a more coherent, broad and balanced curriculum which takes account of young children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. It also dovetails sensibly into the start of the National Curriculum. Furthermore, inspection itself has helped to focus the attention of providers on advancing the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of their programmes. For the most part, they have responded quickly and positively to the key issues for action identified in the published report of their inspection.

As the provision of early years places expands, the Government's intention to match the increase in the capacity of the system to improvements in the quality of education, irrespective of the type of setting, will depend principally upon the availability of well trained teachers and other staff responsible for the day-to-day planning and implementation of the programme. The range of qualifications held by early years staff is wide, and the Government's intention for registered providers to involve a qualified teacher in their plans from September 1999 should help to improve the consistency of provision across the sector.

Clearly, the dependency of young children on adults for care and welfare is greater in these settings than at any other time in the education service. It follows that early years settings must do more than provide education even in its broadest sense. They must demonstrate and reassure parents and others that young children are safe and well cared-for. The Government is conducting a wide-ranging consultation on these matters and at the same time encouraging, through targeted funding, innovative, integrated early years services such as Early Excellence Centres. These approaches should do much to overcome the historical problems of piecemeal provision which have dogged this sector of education for so long.

The value of good early years provision is beyond dispute. Among other things, it promotes children's personal and social development, inspires confident learning, and boosts self-respect and respect for others. It is key to the formation of positive attitudes which ensure that children are well disposed to statutory schooling and which are of fundamental importance to children's educational success as a whole. It also provides crucial opportunities to promote close ties with parents and thus set the direction for continued support from home, which is vital for children's progress at school.

Table 1 : The percentage of nursery settings, by type, likely to promote the Desirable Outcomes for Learning 1997/98

Areas of learning	Playgroup	Private nursery school	Independent school	Local authority day nursery	Private day nursery	Other
Personal and social development	83.5	87.5	89.7	94.1	86.9	91.3
Language and literacy	54.3	80.8	94.3	65.0	73.9	69.8
Mathematics	59.4	82.6	91.8	66.9	74.7	76.1
Knowledge and understanding of the world	52.7	68.3	81.0	69.2	64.6	68.0
Physical development	77.0	72.5	80.4	82.3	78.0	80.2
Creative development	72.9	75.3	80.0	82.3	77.0	80.2

Table 2 : The average percentage of nursery settings likely to promote the Desirable Outcomes 1997/98

Personal and social development	86%
Physical development	77%
Creative development	75%
Mathematics	69%
Language and literacy	65%
Knowledge and understanding of the world	60%

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47 *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning*. SCAA, 1996. The Desirable Outcomes are goals for learning for children by the time they enter compulsory education, which begins in the term after a child's fifth birthday. The Desirable Outcomes cover children's development in six areas of learning: personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world;

physical development; and creative development.

48 Inspections of private, voluntary and independent sector nursery settings were carried out under Section 5 of the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act 1996. Inspections of local education authority and grant maintained schools with four-year-olds were carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996.

Chapter 9
SMALL SCHOOLS

9.1 Small schools: a distinctive element of the primary education system

There has been a debate about the most effective size of school since at least the 1960s, when the Plowden Report[49] suggested that small schools lacked the resources to provide an effective education, limited pupils to a narrow range of opportunities and were unable to provide the necessary range of specialist teacher knowledge for the primary curriculum. The arguments and discussions continued; ten years later it was suggested that a school needed at least eight teachers to provide an adequate range of subjects and that every school should be large enough to provide all pupils with a "broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum".[50] The arguments against small schools were summed up as "The three Cs: curriculum, culture and cost".[51]

Some parents, of course particularly those living in rural areas and without access to convenient transport had no choice in the matter and the local village school was automatically the one to which they sent their children. Other parents, against the trend of the education reports of the day, specifically chose to send their children to small schools. They appreciated the special qualities, such as the "family atmosphere", that many small schools provided.

Researchers, therefore, began to look more closely at the small schools that had survived the rounds of closures and amalgamations. They found that small schools could provide a caring, stable environment where pupils' progress could be tracked more closely and problems identified earlier than in larger schools.[52] The professional isolation of teachers was perceived rather than real, with teachers in small schools just as likely to have attended courses, observed colleagues at work, had visits from advisers and worked with peripatetic staff as teachers in larger schools.[53] Small schools benefited from their place in the local community, and teachers had more frequent informal discussions with parents; closer links were established between home and school; and pupils did not have to adjust to a series of teachers.[54]

Undoubtedly the dual role of headteachers of small schools, combining a considerable class teaching commitment with management responsibility, makes great demands on those headteachers, especially at times of major policy shifts. Nevertheless, the substantial teaching role enables headteachers to have a more direct influence on curriculum development and a closer working understanding of the processes of change; pupils of different ages can work together when appropriate; and clustering arrangements between groups of small schools widen the opportunities for interaction and the sharing of ideas and experiences of staff and pupils.[55]

With the introduction of local management of schools, small schools initially had to manage with a budget based largely on the number of pupils on roll. Many small schools had to campaign to stay open as local education authorities began to rationalise their provision, targeting small schools with high unit-pupil costs. A report by the Audit Commission in 1990 estimated that within the primary sector there were 900,000 surplus places, with a considerable proportion of them in small schools.[56]

This chapter draws together principally evidence from inspection reports, but refers also to inspection evidence from HMI and analysis of National Curriculum test data. For the purposes of this chapter, a "small school" is defined as one with up to 100 pupils; where the distinction is possible, these schools are split into "very small schools" with fewer than 50 pupils and "small schools" with between 51 and 100 pupils. Only pupils of statutory school age are included in these figures. There are about 2,700 small schools, of which about 700 are very small.

About two-thirds of small schools are church schools, generally affiliated to the Church of England; there are few small Roman Catholic schools. The percentage of ethnic minority pupils in small schools is relatively low, with few having more than 5 per cent. The exceptions are usually schools with considerable numbers of Gypsy and Traveller pupils.

9.2 Standards of achievement

Pupils in small schools are not disadvantaged in comparison with those in larger schools simply because of the size of the school. Small schools are capable of providing an effective education, and many are among the most successful schools in the country. At the same time a disproportionate number of the smallest schools have serious weaknesses or require special measures.

In the end-of-key-stage National Curriculum tests, small schools achieve on average higher scores than larger schools. The very small schools, while also achieving test results well above the average overall, are more variable in their performance. The schools in the 51100 band are the most successful. For example, in the 1998 National Curriculum English tests at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, pupils in schools with between 51 and 100 pupils achieved results around six percentage points higher than those in larger schools. Several factors contribute to this positive picture: the quality of the school and its teaching, of course, but also the fact that the majority of small schools are in relatively affluent areas with above-average indicators of socio-economic advantage. Among the schools of between 51 and 100 pupils, the most effective are the small, rural, church primary schools in advantaged areas, typically within commuting distance of towns and cities. The range of achievement of small schools is, however, very wide; some small schools achieve an average level of almost Level 5, while there are others averaging just over Level 3.

When National Curriculum test data is used to compare small schools with others in similar socio-economic circumstances, there is little difference in performance; if anything, the balance of judgement moves in favour of larger schools. In other words, factors other than size probably have a greater overall influence on standards in small schools. On the other hand, many parents choose to send their pupils to small schools for a wide range of reasons, such as the ethos of the school, the attention that parents consider can be given to the particular needs of their children, and the links that the school maintains with its local community.

Small schools and, in particular, very small schools have small cohorts of pupils in each year group. The results of the end-of-key-stage National Curriculum tests can inevitably fluctuate widely from one year to the next, because the scores of one or two pupils can have a significant influence on a school's results. For this reason the Key Stage 2 results for cohorts with less than eleven pupils are not published separately.

From an analysis by school size of the results of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results, several features emerge:

- In the performance tables of the 199698 Key Stage 2 results for English, mathematics and science, there were between 20 and 30 small schools each year in the highest-achieving 100. This is at least twice the number that might have been expected on purely statistical grounds; and it does not include those successful very small schools with cohorts of less than eleven pupils and whose results were not published.
- At the other end of the scale, there were between three and ten schools in the table of the lowest-scoring schools. Again, these numbers do not include the very small schools, but the presence of some of these in the "serious weakness" and "special measures" categories would increase the number of small schools in the bottom 100.
- The number of small schools in the list of successful schools published in HMCI's Annual Report has included a larger number of small schools than would have been expected.
- The number of small schools (51100 pupils) which have been judged to require special measures or to have serious weaknesses is a little below the average for all schools, but the number of very small schools requiring special measures is much greater than the average. The number of very small schools with serious weaknesses is higher than the average.

9.3 The quality of teaching

The quality of the teaching in small schools is slightly better than in larger schools; the influence of the teaching of the headteacher, which may account for as much as one-third of the teaching seen during an inspection, has a very strong, and usually positive, impact on the overall judgement about the quality of the teaching in a small school. Overall, the teaching in schools with between 51 and 100 pupils is marginally stronger than in schools of other sizes. By contrast, the quality of the teaching of the under-fives in small schools often compares unfavourably with the rest of the

teaching in the school and with the national picture. The teaching of the under-fives is more frequently unsatisfactory than in

larger schools. Chart 51 illustrates the quality of the teaching according to the size of the school.

There is no evidence to suggest that pupils in small schools are disadvantaged because their teachers lack sufficient subject knowledge, understanding and skills to teach the required broad curriculum with appropriate academic challenge. This reflects very well on the arrangements for the in-service training of teachers and headteachers in small schools. For example, **Delamere CE Primary School**, Cheshire:

> *Despite the small number of staff there is an adequate spread of subject specialisms. The school has concentrated its in-service training effort mostly on developing expertise in curriculum areas because of the multiple subject responsibilities of individual members of staff. Teachers are committed to improving their performance and have given a great deal of time to extra training in subjects and other cross-curricular areas such as special educational needs. The school has benefited substantially from this.*

In tackling the challenge of providing sufficient expertise in all subjects, small schools make good use of their strengths, both within their own teaching staff and the local community. There are many examples of the effective use of part-time specialists and volunteers from the community, well planned use of non-teaching staff and good management strategies to enable the teachers to be as effective as possible; for example, teachers exchange classes to enable them to teach their strong subjects to as many pupils as possible. Indeed, in a recent survey by HMI,[57] some of the best examples of the successful use of subject specialists were found in small schools, reinforcing the view that small schools work hard to ensure that their pupils have access to adequate expertise to teach the full range of skills, knowledge and understanding required by each subject.

West Meon CE Primary School, Hampshire, recognised the challenges facing three full-time teachers in teaching eleven subjects to classes containing pupils from as many as three year groups. Where necessary and possible, the school brought in outside help, often from the local community, to extend the curriculum or to plug gaps. The small size of the school was exploited as a strength rather than a constraint: all the teachers knew what each other was doing, and all the pupils (about 60) knew all the teachers; they also knew the additional adults, most of whom were living in the village. With so few staff involved, changes could be made relatively easily. The arrangements change from year to year, and a change of staff can make a big difference, but the school was very much alert to subject needs when new appointments were made. In 1997, for example:

- the mathematics co-ordinator took her own class (Years 5 and 6) for mathematics and extended the work of Years 3 and 4 by taking their class once or twice a week;
- this allowed a straightforward exchange with the art specialist, who therefore taught art to all Key Stage 2 pupils;
- a part-time physical education teacher was employed to teach gymnastics to the Key Stage 1 pupils and the Year 3 and 4 class, so that a relatively modest expenditure extended the quality and range of the teaching;
- the Key Stage 1 teacher (the English specialist) took the Year 5 and 6 class for writing once a week and also taught reading skills once a week;
- the part-time special needs teacher took the top class for personal and social education once a week; and once a week the rector (this is a church school) discussed a moral or ethical issue with the Year 6 pupils;
- other volunteers made valuable contributions: a rota of parents and friends heard readers; a play-reading session was taken by a volunteer from the village; and the choir was taught by a local musician.

Small schools usually have classes containing pupils of more than one age group, and sometimes from more than one key stage. The wide range of age and ability in a class places great demands on the teacher, but effective teaching of these mixed-age classes is consistent with the planning and classroom organisation frequently seen in these classes. The behaviour of the pupils is almost always good, and class sizes are usually smaller; teachers know their pupils particularly well, often teaching them for more than one year. Group sizes are smaller, and the teacher can increase the amount of direct teaching provided for a pupil or a group of pupils. Where teaching is weak, ineffective planning fails to take account of the range of age and ability in a class and proper academic challenge is lacking. The potential impact of a weak teacher on the school career of an individual pupil and on the overall quality of a school can be considerable, and much greater than in a larger school where others can compensate to some extent for a particular weak link.

Provision for pupils under five is a cause for concern. Overall judgements made by inspectors relating to all aspects of the quality of teaching are considerably more critical than those given in larger schools, where the quality of the teaching of the youngest children is often the strongest element of the teaching. Teachers clearly find it hard to pitch work of appropriate

challenge and range for a class which contains under-fives working towards the Desirable Learning Outcomes and those older pupils embarking on the National Curriculum programmes of study. On the one hand, there are pupils who have already achieved the Desirable Outcomes and should be moving on to more challenging work; on the other hand, there are pupils who are not given an appropriate early years curriculum and are moved on too quickly. In general, the provision is least effective when there are only a few pupils under five and where these pupils, of necessity, form a minority group within a class of largely older pupils. There are signs of improvement, however, and many schools are supporting the youngest pupils with teaching assistants all the more effective when the assistant has NNEB training.

Chart 51 : The quality of teaching according to the size of the school 1997/98

9.4 The curriculum

It is well within the capacity of small schools to teach the full range of the National Curriculum. Many do it well, making good use of their environment and the community. They often supplement the strengths of staff with outside help, which provides not only better provision for the National Curriculum subjects but also extends the range of curricular and extracurricular activities on offer; a remarkable number of the most successful small schools offer a modern foreign language, for example. At the other end of the spectrum, however, there is a significant minority of small schools which do not provide a broad curriculum and offer little by way of enrichment or special interest.

The curriculum of small schools at both key stages is generally as broad and as balanced as that of larger schools, but, as has already been reported above, can be weaker for the under-fives. As with the majority of schools, small schools have moved towards a more subject-based curriculum over the four years of the inspection cycle; specialist teachers and members of the local community are frequently involved in the teaching of some subjects, particularly music, design and technology, and physical education. The challenge of teaching numeracy and literacy to mixed-age classes from Frameworks which spell out what is to be taught to specific age groups but which also emphasise the value of whole-class teaching is one with which small schools are beginning to grapple. But, this challenge is nothing new; small schools have always had to choose appropriate content and pedagogy for their mixed-age classes, and inspection evidence shows that they have generally been successful in this.

Most small schools provide a range of extra-curricular activities, and take their pupils on visits, both local and residential. They often go to considerable lengths to involve the pupils in local sports and musical activities, including the opportunities to enable children to play and work with children of their own age from other schools. The quality of such provision depends very largely on the enthusiasm and ingenuity of individual teachers, but it is also related to access to local facilities such as sports halls or leisure centres. Provision is often weakest where local facilities are poor or non-existent, or where a catchment area is very widespread and the pupils have long distances to travel. Curricular provision both in and out of school hours is strongly supported and much appreciated by parents; their involvement in their children's learning is a strength of the large majority of small schools.

9.5 The ethos of small schools

One of the great strengths of small schools is their ethos. Very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, considerable parental involvement in their children's learning, and strong links with the community all contribute significantly to the establishment of caring, welcoming schools often seen as playing an essential role at the heart of a local community. The best small schools recognise the dangers of isolation and tackle the issue head-on. For example, **Grade-Ruan VC Primary School**, near Helston, Cornwall:

> *Cultural education is a strength of the school. Pupils are taught about the historical and living culture of the Duchy and this is well-integrated into all areas of the curriculum. Pupils take part in musical events, in local pageants and festivals and visit local art galleries and museums. They are also taught to understand and respect other cultures. There are good links with other countries: the oldest children go each year on a residential trip to Brittany and attend a partner school. Pupils keep in touch by letters and by fascimile, exchanging data as well as news of more personal interest. There are also links with a school in Kenya. Visitors to the school, such as a Japanese teacher, enhance cross-curricular links. These are well followed-up and enrich the curriculum in many subjects. Although the school is geographically isolated, this has not prevented the staff from ensuring that pupils are well aware of the world outside the peninsula.*
>
> *Links with industry have been established through liaison with the Confederation of British Industries and*

the Cornwall Education Business Partnership. Particularly noteworthy initiatives have been visits to the Architects' Department and Buildings Office at County Hall, the monitoring of the Global Challenge Yacht Race with the help of British Telecom and work with RNAS Culdrose for a project on the weather.

The provision for spiritual development in small schools with close church links is stronger than that for larger schools. Schools in less advantaged areas which achieve well are reported to have a particularly strong ethos, often enabling them to handle difficult pupils well.

Even small schools with weaknesses in the teaching or with unsatisfactory standards tend to have a positive ethos, although when things get sufficiently bad for a school to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures then, not surprisingly, weaknesses in the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are reported.

9.6 Leadership and management

The majority of headteachers of small schools provide clear educational direction for their school, although as with schools in general there are weaknesses in the leadership in around one school in seven. The role of the headteacher in a small school is, however, different from that of a headteacher in a larger school. Workloads are balanced in a different way for the teaching headteacher; smaller numbers of pupils make some tasks lighter, but others prove more demanding and time-consuming because teaching and management work overlap during the school day. There are also, of course, fewer adults. It is unlikely that a small school will have a deputy headteacher, and the concept of a senior management team is unlikely to be appropriate; the school secretary is likely to have less hours each week than in a larger school. All adults, especially the headteacher, are likely to carry multiple responsibilities, not just in terms of management but for the co-ordination of subjects.

Combining leadership with a substantial teaching role can, however, be a powerful way to influence the process of change. The teaching commitment enables a headteacher to "lead from the front" and to understand the processes involved in curriculum development. It also ensures that the headteacher knows at first hand what pupils know and can do; and it should reveal priorities for spending or training very clearly. On the other hand, weakness or enforced absence through, for example, illness or even secondment to alternative work can have an immediate and depressing effect on a small school.

Good teaching and good management are, not surprisingly, the two most significant characteristics of effective small schools. In practice, this means that the influence of the headteacher is a more than usually important factor in determining the quality of a small school. When the teaching or the management, or both, are weak, there are few ways to cushion the adverse effects. By the same token, however, the strength of the headteacher's influence in a small school also means that change and development can be brought about more quickly than in a larger organisation.

Governors are increasingly aware of the supportive role they can play. In many small schools they, too, have multiple roles, and inspection reports show how strong this partnership can be. At times, however, the governors leave too much to the headteacher and the resulting overload can lessen the effectiveness of the leadership.

9.7 Finance and efficiency

Small schools have higher unit costs than larger schools; they cost more per pupil than larger schools, and the cost per pupil rises as the school gets smaller. Judging value for money in a small school is a complex exercise; even successful small schools cost more to run per pupil than larger schools. What is clear, however, is that in most small schools day-to-day administration is efficient and there is usually careful financial planning and budgetary control. In addition, many small schools are particularly good at raising funds in the local community. By and large, small schools spend what money they have wisely and effectively.

Most small schools have sufficient resources to teach the National Curriculum. However, there is a wide spread of provision and the smallest schools often have the weakest resourcing. Local fundraising can play a particularly important role in enhancing the resources of a small school.

The quality of the accommodation in small schools is adequate in three-quarters of the schools. In one-third of the schools the accommodation is good. In an effort to modernise and to provide for the National Curriculum, many small schools have been given new or refurbished premises and now have good facilities. The demise of the outside toilet has been a long time coming, but much appreciated by caretakers, staff and pupils alike especially in winter!

Nevertheless, overall, small schools have poorer accommodation than larger schools, and the smallest schools have the least

satisfactory buildings: one-quarter of the smallest schools and one in five of the small schools have inadequate accommodation. Problems include cramped classrooms; insufficient facilities for the youngest children; a lack of space for outdoor play; and complicated arrangements for physical education, dinners and wet weather playtime. Many of these schools, however, have ingenious ways of circumventing their difficulties, often making good use of alternative local facilities such as church halls.

9.8 In conclusion

The features which make a small school successful are often those which combine to make a larger school successful, and inevitably include good teaching and good management. More specific to the small size of a school, and often directly related to the typical rural location and favourable economic circumstances of many small schools, are the close involvement of the local community in supporting the day-to-day work and extra-curricular activities of the school; the strong personal links between parents and the teachers; smaller class size and continuity of staffing; the ingenuity of the staff in overcoming problems with the accommodation, resources or expertise available; the establishment of networks of support from clusters of small schools; and a commitment by parents and the school to achieve the highest possible standards. The strength of "save our school" campaigns in rural areas is testimony to the warmth often felt by a local community for its school.

There remains a sense of vulnerability in small schools, however. If things go wrong and a school's reputation declines, parents are quick to register their protest by moving their children to another school. A weakness in the teaching or leadership can have a devastating impact on the school career of a pupil. It only takes the loss of a few families to have a significant impact on the organisation and morale of a small school. Fortunately, though, such schools form a small minority and, as this chapter indicates, most small schools are achieving standards and providing a quality of education at least as good as those achieved in larger establishments.

49*Children and their Primary Schools* (The Plowden Report). HMSO, 1967.

50*Primary Education in England. A Report by HMI*. DES, 1978.

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52Arnold, R and Roberts B (1990). "Small Primary Schools: A report for education officers and advisers", *International Journal of Education Management,* Vol 4, No 5.

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56 Audit Commission (1990). *Rationalising Primary School Provision*. London: HMSO.

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Chapter 10
SPECIAL EDUCATIONALNEEDS

10.1 Provision

OFSTED is publishing separately a four-year review based on the inspection of every special school in England. This chapter reports on the provision in mainstream primary schools for pupils identified as having special educational needs. It also reports on the implementation of the Code of Practice and includes evidence about the provision of "units" for pupils with special educational needs in primary schools. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good in the majority of primary schools (six in ten in 1996/97, for example), and is rarely inadequate.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs was the focus of considerable change between 1994 and 1998. This was mainly as a result of the 1993 Education Act and the subsequent guidance in the Code of Practice[58] on the identification and assessment of special educational needs and in Circular 6/94 on the organisation of special educational provision. A significant and positive change in primary schools has been, over the past four years, the establishment of the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). The expectations on this role have been substantial, but considerable expertise has been acquired by many SENCOs and their work has been influential and effective. It has generally been the SENCO, with support from the headteacher, who has driven forward the changes required by the 1993 Act and the Code of Practice. SENCOs have established appropriate procedures for keeping a register of pupils' special educational needs and for preparing and revising individual education plans. However, these are time-consuming tasks, and many co-ordinators have been concerned about the time taken by their role; indeed, some have been unable to complete the recommended termly reviews.

The estimations made in 1978 (the Warnock Report[59]), that 20 per cent of pupils would have special educational needs at some time in their school careers and that 2 per cent would have long-term needs which would require a Statement of Special Educational Need, have continued to be reflected in recent legislation. A Statement of Special Educational Need follows a detailed multi-disciplinary assessment of a pupil's needs and sets out the special educational provision required to meet those needs. The statement is a legal document and is kept under statutory annual review. It is expected that pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, will be educated in mainstream schools if:

- their needs can be met;
- the education of the other pupils is not hindered;
- the placement meets with the wishes of the parents; and
- the placement represents an efficient use of resources.

In January 1998 just under 3 per cent of school-age pupils had a Statement of Special Educational Need and 20 per cent of all primary-aged pupils were identified as having special educational needs, including those with statements. Both the percentage of pupils with a statement and the proportion of these pupils placed in mainstream schools increased steadily throughout the 1990s. Fifty-eight per cent of pupils with statements were placed in mainstream schools in 1998 compared with 48 per cent in 1993. Of the children for whom a statement was first written in 1997, 71 per cent were placed in mainstream schools, compared with 66 per cent in 1994 and 59 per cent in 1992. Roughly twice as many pupils in Key Stage 2 have Statements of Special Educational Need than in Key Stage 1. The majority of schools identify between 10 per cent and 24 per cent of pupils as having special needs; over a quarter of schools identify more than 25 per cent of pupils as having special needs.

There are considerable variations amongst local education authorities in relation to the numbers of pupils with statements. These often reflect a local education authority's policy in respect of the way funding is allocated for the provision of pupils with special educational needs. Some have relatively high percentages of pupils with statements, while others have relatively few such pupils. The proportions vary from over 5 per cent to just over 1 per cent. In addition, the proportion of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need taught in mainstream schools as opposed to special schools differs widely between

local education authorities. For example, a few local education authorities have over 90 per cent of their pupils with statements in mainstream schools. At the other extreme, a few have less than 35 per cent of their statemented pupils in mainstream schools. This is clearly related to the number of special schools that a local education authority has decided to maintain.

10.2 Promoting high achievement for pupils with special educational needs

In 1996, OFSTED published the results of a survey[60] conducted by HMI of how schools identified pupils with special educational needs, the provision made for these pupils and their achievements in mainstream schools. In general, HMI found that the quality of teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs had major shortcomings in too many lessons. In particular, the survey found that:

- throughout the primary phase, the quality of teaching and learning and the standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs were frequently too variable, both within and between schools;
- where support was not available, or where it was insufficiently well informed, both the standards of achievement and the quality of education suffered;
- where no extra support was present, pupils with special educational needs benefited no less than others from good teaching, which took full account of the needs of all pupils;
- the most influential factor on the effectiveness of in-class support was the quality of joint planning of the work between the class teacher and the support teacher or learning support assistant;
- all pupils gained from extra in-class support, but pupils with special educational needs gained the most;
- learning support assistants were effective in helping to raise the standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs;
- the quality of educational provision in withdrawal sessions, outside the classroom, was generally sound but focused almost exclusively on literacy skills.

The key features of lessons in which effective learning took place, including withdrawal groups and individual support lessons, were:

- activities which were clearly targeted, focused and challenging for the pupils;
- careful planning, which responded to the specific nature of a pupil's individual learning needs;
- the tracking of individual progress against carefully constructed programmes of work;
- sessions linked to the work being undertaken by the rest of the class, with the class teacher being aware of what was taking place and sharing records;
- teaching which fitted into whole-school approaches, such as concentrating on a school approach to teaching phonic skills;
- time used flexibly so that pupils did not lose their curricular entitlement, for example not always being withdrawn from music.

The following example illustrates good practice where pupils are withdrawn from mainstream classes for individual or group work:

> *Ten pupils are withdrawn from two classes in Year 3 and Year 4 as they have similar literacy difficulties. They are achieving around Level 2 for reading and writing, below age-related expectations. The focus is on reading for meaning, writing and spelling, with the specific aim of developing levels of concentration. The work is linked to a whole-school anti-bullying programme. The planning and organisation of the session by the class and support teachers show a thorough understanding of pupils' individual needs. A range of*

appropriate worksheets, carefully selected, supports reading and writing activities, and computer software with a voice synthesiser encourages independent learning. Pupils enjoy these thrice-weekly sessions, can articulate why they need extra help, but display good levels of self-esteem. They apply previously learned skills to the new words and sentences. Progress is clear, carefully monitored and conveyed to their class teachers.

At the time of the 1994 survey, the majority of schools were in the process of reviewing their policies for special educational needs in the light of the Code of Practice. While considerable progress was being made, initially the main thrust in most schools gave priority to procedural and administrative detail. Less than half the schools in the survey provided appropriate guidance for class or subject teachers on strategies for teaching the range of pupils with special educational needs.

10.3 The Code of Practice

In 1997 HMI published a survey[61] into the implementation of the Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs and found that steady progress was being made in almost all primary schools. In particular:

- most schools were aware of the major implications of the Code of Practice for all teachers;
- increased attention was being given to special needs issues in primary schools, especially to the need to provide pupils with special educational needs with a broad and balanced curriculum, including the National Curriculum;
- there was a better match between the educational provision made and pupils' special educational needs;
- schools were more successful at identifying pupils' learning and behavioural problems;
- almost all primary schools had a designated SENCO and best practice occurred when the SENCO had sufficient time to liaise, co-ordinate and support staff throughout the school;
- most schools were establishing procedures for keeping a register of special educational needs, for preparing and reviewing individual education plans, and for liaising with parents, colleagues and external support services;
- local education authorities had produced good-quality guidance for schools on the implementation of the Code of Practice, although there was little assistance on how to apply the guidance effectively.

Some areas of difficulty remained, however, in particular:

- while better identification procedures were in place, teachers were less successful in monitoring the progress of pupils or the effectiveness of the teaching and additional support that pupils receive;
- many schools could not provide detailed information about their funding arrangements for special educational needs, often due to unclear information from local education authorities but more frequently because the school itself did not have a clear rationale for the proportion of its funds which should reasonably be spent to support pupils with special educational needs;
- the majority of special educational needs policies did not comply totally with the statutory requirements. Teachers, and particularly governors, were often unclear about their statutory duties, most often in relation to the statutory requirement on governors to report to parents annually on the success of the school's special educational needs policy and practice;
- changes to the organisation and funding of health authorities had left schools very confused about who is responsible for making provision, and in particular with whom to liaise, for the support of pupils requiring physiotherapy and speech therapy;
- the lack of adequate support from some local education authority support services for pupils with more serious difficulties, although without a statement, which as a consequence often led to a statement being necessary.

Of all the recommendations made by the Code of Practice, the writing and reviewing of individual education plans continued to give the greatest cause of concern to SENCOs, with many reporting that they did not have the time to complete the recommended termly review of individual education plans, especially without access to clerical assistance.

The DfEE, in its most recent publication,[62] recognises the need for further development in special educational needs policy and practice as part of the Government's school improvement strategy. The recommended programme of action sets out an expectation that the proportion of pupils with statements being educated in mainstream schools should be increased over the next four years. In addition, it sets out plans to produce a revised Code of Practice to take effect during the academic year 2000/01.

10.4 Additional special educational needs provision or "units" for pupils with special educational needs in primary schools

While a high proportion of pupils with statements are educated in mainstream primary schools, this is often in additional-provision or specially resourced designated "units", usually additionally funded by the local education authority. Much of this provision has been well established over many years. Many local education authorities are increasing this type of provision, sometimes to replace special schools, most often those for pupils with visual or hearing impairment, or physical disabilities.

Additional special educational needs provision is usually for a specific group of pupils, almost always with a Statement of Special Educational Need for example, pupils with hearing impairment, including those who use signing either as their primary means of communication or as a supplement to hearing and lip-reading; visual impairment, including pupils who use braille; speech and language difficulties; and physical difficulties, including those using wheelchairs and with severely reduced mobility.

Admission policies for additional provision are usually negotiated between the school and its governors and the local education authority. In some provision, the placement of pupils has gradually changed for example, increasing numbers of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in a moderate learning difficulties provision. In the best practice, admission policies are kept under careful review and, where changes occur, staff have opportunities to undertake additional training. Some admission policies emphasise the intention to reintegrate pupils into their own mainstream schools or to retain pupils for a specified length of time, as is often the case for many pupils with speech and language difficulties. In some local education authorities a mismatch of provision between primary and secondary schools leads to considerable difficulties for the placement of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Additional special educational needs provision is inspected as part of the inspection of the host school. Inspection reports and HMI surveys[63] have indicated much good practice, which has improved over the four-year period, often in line with the positive developments which have taken place as a result of the Code of Practice.

The attainment of pupils in additional provision is usually below and often well below national expectations, but there are exceptions. For example, in a survey of the teaching of reading to pupils with hearing impairment, HMI found[64] that one-third of the pupils attained standards in line with those expected for their ages. In several schools with provision for pupils with visual impairment, it was found that at the end of Key Stage 2 more-able pupils who were competent braillers were able to read and write as well as their sighted peers. The emphasis in inspection reports, however, for most pupils with special educational needs is usually on the progress that they as individuals make over time rather than comparisons with national expectations.

Progress made by pupils with a range of special educational needs was judged to be satisfactory and often good. For example, in a survey of provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties HMI found that the pupils made good progress in reading, and satisfactory progress with spelling and writing. The greatest variation in progress reported by inspectors was for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, and emotional and behavioural difficulties. In some schools there was insufficient planning for these pupils and insufficient challenge in order to raise standards.

In most cases teachers working in specialised provision had additional qualifications in an aspect of special educational needs and they were skilled and experienced mainstream teachers or occasionally had a special school background. In most cases the quality of teaching was sound or better, but there were exceptions. In the best lessons which covered all types of special educational needs:

- individual education plans had targets which were clear and precise, they had a specified timescale for example six to eight weeks and they could be monitored simply, for example by ticking whether the skill had been achieved;

- support staff and learning support assistants were well briefed;
- planning took good account of the individual needs of the pupils;
- activities were well matched to the pupils' needs, ensuring a level of success;
- positive feedback was given to the pupils, spelling out exactly what was good about their work;
- good relationships enabled pupils to feel valued and supported;
- pupils, often as young as seven, knew their targets and strived to reach them;
- day-to-day assessment of pupils' progress facilitated good planning for the next lesson.

Some excellent lessons were seen with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, in which each had a set of targets in literacy which were assessed at the end of every lesson by recording the skills acquired. The pupils developed a tremendous sense of achievement, which they were proud to share with others.

The majority of pupils placed in additional special educational needs provision had access to a broad and balanced curriculum, and there was no disapplication from the National Curriculum. However, the provision often catered for a wide age and ability range, at worst two key stages and at best two year groups in a single key stage. Balancing integration opportunities in mainstream classes with specialist teaching and the deployment of staff to support pupils was a difficult process which needed continuous monitoring. In many cases it worked well, especially when the support in mainstream classes was well deployed, as in the case of many pupils with hearing, visual and physical difficulties; but integration in mainstream classes was most difficult for pupils with moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. At times there was too much emphasis on core skills at the expense of other areas of the curriculum, while at the same time there were instances of a lack of support for pupils in foundation subjects.

In most cases, pupils were on the register of the appropriate mainstream class. They had opportunities to work in this class and to develop friendships, and they had additional support in withdrawal groups. Much depended, however, on the quality of communication between the specialist teacher and the mainstream teacher so that literacy and numeracy skills, for example, could be reinforced in other curricular areas. In the best practice the specialist teacher joined in the shared curriculum-planning process with other teachers, and there was added strength where this also included the school SENCO. In these situations, staff could share in contributing to the overall provision of the school and, from this, specific projects such as family literacy initiatives sometimes emerged.

In much of the provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties, the joint work between speech therapists, teachers and learning support assistants was excellent in the quality of support it gave pupils. Likewise in the provision for pupils with physical difficulties, the joint work with physiotherapists was equally valuable for pupils' progress. Services from outside the school were well used to develop the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs. Educational psychology services frequently provided good advice on developing individual education plans for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Appropriate attention was usually, but not always, given to developing mobility skills for pupils with visual impairment and the development of their social skills in some schools, but this was not consistent for these pupils.

Assessment practices were usually at least satisfactory, with effective baseline assessment and good-quality individual education plans. While in the survey of the teaching of reading to pupils with hearing impairment in mainstream schools no pupils had been disapplied from the statutory tests completely, in some cases pupils had been disapplied from the written tests but not from teacher assessment. Annual reviews were usually well managed and transition to secondary schools well thought-out.

Partnership with parents was an important goal and in some cases this was very well achieved. In the best practice, teachers made good links with parents, some of whom lived a distance from the school. They provided homeschool books and termly meetings focusing on the progress made by the pupil and social events. In one school with provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties, parents, alongside mainstream pupils and staff, attended classes to learn signing so that they could use it with their children.

The management of additional special educational needs provision was usually good. In the best provision, the specialist staff were committed to, and clear about, their goals. The headteacher had a good knowledge of special educational needs issues and undertook a role in monitoring the quality of the specialists' work. This commitment was also reflected by the governors, who understood the role of the provision and actively supported it in the school. School development planning included development targets for the provision. There was, however, almost no evaluation of the effectiveness of the provision in order

to plan its further development.

In most cases the provision was adequately staffed, with teachers and learning support assistants suitably qualified and experienced. In a number of schools the specialist teacher was also the SENCO for the whole school; where time had been made available this was a valuable role in giving the specialist teacher an overview. It also enabled mainstream staff to see the teacher as a full member of the school's staff. In some schools, however, the specialist teacher promoted a separateness which was not in the best interests of the pupils.

Specialist teachers had sufficient access to in-service training but their choice of professional course was more often focused on special educational needs issues than on subject development issues. There were good examples of in-service training to the whole of a school's staffing, before additional provision was established and periodically as needs or staff changed.

Resources for learning were sufficient overall, except for the use made of information and communication technology for pupils with all types of need. For example, pupils with moderate learning difficulties, who would have benefited from using computers, and in particular concept keyboards, to develop their writing skills, sometimes had no access to this equipment. The underuse of computers for developing reading skills with pupils with hearing impairment delayed progress. However, there was good use of supportive technology such as closed-circuit television to support pupils with visual impairments.

Accommodation for additional special educational needs provision was usually appropriate to the needs of the pupils and in many cases has become available because of falling rolls in the host school. Appropriate modifications have often been made, such as soundproofing to assist pupils who are deaf and improved floor surfaces for pupils with physical difficulties. Inspectors often commented positively on the location of a base room when it was in the heart of the school rather than in a separate building or located at the end of a corridor; location was important to the achievement of a sense of inclusion for pupils with special educational needs.

Funding for the additional special educational needs provision for pupils with hearing and visual impairments was usually centrally managed by the local education authority, which enabled the provision to be managed flexibly as the incidence, age and location of pupils with these disabilities changed. Funding for all other types of provision was often delegated, and in the best practice it was supported by a service-level agreement. In most cases funding was sufficient to meet the needs of the pupils, but it was not always based upon clear criteria for allocation.

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58 *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*. DfEE, 1994.

59 *Special Educational Needs Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*. HMSO, 1978.

60 *Promoting High Achievement for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*. OFSTED, 1996.

61 *The SEN Code of Practice: Two Years On*. OFSTED, 1997.

62 *Meeting Special Educational Needs: a Programme of Action*. DfEE, 1998.

63 *Promoting High Achievement for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*. OFSTED, 1996.

64 *The Teaching of Reading to Pupils with Hearing Impairment in Mainstream Schools*. OFSTED, 1998.

Chapter 11
LITERACY AND NUMERACY

11.1 Inspection evidence

In 1994/95 inspectors reported that pupils achieved well in about half of primary schools in English, and in a little over two in five primary schools in mathematics. The Annual Report for 1994/95 concluded that: "In Key Stage 2 standards (in English) require considerable improvement in about one-tenth of schools. In mathematics standards require considerable improvement in about one-sixth of schools." This view from inspection supported claims from researchers involved in international comparisons that English pupils achieved relatively poorly in mathematics in comparison to Pacific Rim societies such as China, Korea and Taiwan.[65]

There is ample evidence to show that the performance of pupils in England lags behind that of many of our international counterparts in important aspects of mathematics. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)[66] of pupil performance pointed to long-standing weaknesses in the performance of English nine-year-olds, particularly in number. In the TIMSS, the same teachers and pupils took part in both the mathematics and the science assessments of the nine-year-old pupils. These same pupils performed well in science and considerably less well in important aspects of mathematics. The findings, therefore, reinforced the view that it is what schools and teachers do which makes a substantial difference to pupils' performance rather than other factors such as home background or the ability of pupils, which are "outside their control".

In 1993, OFSTED published its report on *Access and Achievement in Urban Education*,[67] which drew attention to the underachievement by significant numbers of pupils and students in urban schools and colleges. One of its themes was that pupils in schools in disadvantaged areas require particularly skilled teaching in oral and written communication, including reading.

OFSTED responded to the growing debate about the teaching of numeracy and literacy by requiring inspectors to report more directly on literacy and numeracy skills in 1994/95 and 1995/96. Charts 5255 summarise inspectors' judgements on literacy and numeracy skills for the two years (1994/95 and 1995/96) at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

On the basis of the inspection evidence, the conclusions from the 1995/96 Annual Report were:

> *Pupils' skills in **speaking and listening** are generally good. Pupils listen attentively, talk confidently about their work and express their ideas clearly. In over half of schools, pupils' **reading** skills are good in both key stages, but in just under one in ten in Key Stage 1 and one in eight in Key Stage 2 they are poor. Many pupils are not able to read accurately. Phonic work in particular still needs to be strengthened in many schools. **Writing** skills remain weaker than those in speaking and listening, and are poor in Key Stage 2 in one-fifth of schools: weak spelling and sentence construction, limited vocabulary and lack of attention to improving work by redrafting are the main problems. Too many children continue to leave their primary schools poorly equipped with the essential skills of reading and writing.*
>
> *In mathematics, standards in **number** are good in about half of primary schools, but are poor in one in seven in Key Stage 2. Standards in **shape and space** and **data handling** are generally higher than those in number. In Key Stage 2, pupils spend too much time unproductively repeating work that they have already mastered. This slows progress in Years 3 and 4, but there is an improvement in Year 6. In schools where a substantial amount of mathematics is taught directly to the whole teaching group or class, and pupils regularly undertake oral and mental work, standards are generally higher than where the approach is overwhelmingly that of individual work.*

Inspection evidence, therefore, was beginning to demonstrate a strong relationship between standards of reading, writing and numeracy and the method of teaching. In 1995, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector announced that he would follow up the inspection evidence and the findings of the Access and Achievement in Urban Education report. HMI, working closely with

three local education authorities in London (Islington, Southwark and Tower Hamlets), inspected the teaching of reading in 45 primary schools, 15 from each authority. The inspections concentrated on the teaching of reading in Year 2 and Year 6 in each school, and were backed up by a common test of reading administered by the National Foundation for Educational Research to the Year 2 and Year 6 pupils in the survey schools.

The following year HMI conducted a similar survey into the teaching of number in Year 2 and Year 6 in 45 schools in three other local education authorities (Greenwich, Newham and Knowsley). In both surveys the local education authorities were selected because their publicly available indicators National Curriculum test scores, and General Certificate of Secondary Education grades for English and mathematics were comparatively low. All six authorities face some of the most severe socio-economic conditions in the country, including high proportions of low-income families, areas with high and long-term unemployment, and (in most cases) high proportions of families for whom English is an additional language.

One outcome of the considerable interest in, and concern about, the teaching of literacy and numeracy was the establishment in September 1996 by the DfEE of the National Literacy Project and the National Numeracy Project. The approaches taken by these projects were extended nationally into the National Literacy Strategy in September 1998 and the National Numeracy Strategy from September 1999. Finally, in the summer of 1997 a small number of "Summer Literacy Schools" was established, followed the next year by a larger number of literacy and numeracy summer schools.

This chapter draws principally on five sources of evidence in its review of literacy and numeracy: the two surveys of the teaching of literacy and numeracy in three urban local education authorities; the evaluations, conducted by HMI, of the National Literacy Project and the National Numeracy Project; and initial reports on the 1998 summer literacy schools.

Chart 52 : Speaking and listening

Chart 53 : Reading

Chart 54 : Writing

Chart 55 : Numeracy

11.2 *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner-London Primary Schools*

In the survey referred to above,[68] intakes of the majority of the schools represent some of the highest levels of disadvantage in the country. They generally had higher proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, higher numbers of pupils with English as an additional language, and both higher pupil turnover and higher staff turnover than the national averages. These are challenging circumstances in which to teach reading and the central problem, reflected in the under-achievement of many pupils in reading, was the wide variation in the quality of the teaching.

Reading scores in the standardised tests were significantly below national norms, and a large group of white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds performed poorly. In Year 2, only about one in five pupils achieved a reading age at or above their chronological age. Almost one in five achieved no score at all. Of those achieving no score at all, about half were from non-English-speaking home backgrounds. In Year 6, two pupils in five achieved a reading age at or above their chronological age; about one-quarter of the pupils in Year 6 were one year or more ahead of their age norms.

However, four out of ten of the pupils in Year 6 achieved reading ages which were two years or more below their chronological age. Black African pupils performed better than other ethnic groups at both Year 2 and Year 6. Bangladeshi pupils achieved low scores in Year 2 but performed better in Year 6. White pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds performed least well and constituted the largest group of underachievers at Year 6.

The commentary on these test results is unequivocal, and the spotlight falls fairly and squarely on the quality of the teaching in the classroom, namely how reading is taught:

> *The wide gulf in pupils' reading performance is serious and unacceptable. Some schools and pupils are doing well against the odds while others in similar circumstances are not. It is clear that it is what individual schools do that makes the difference to their pupils' reading performance. It follows that the*

underperforming schools must do things differently if the large numbers of low-achieving pupils are to receive the quality of teaching they need and deserve to make the progress of which they are capable.

The survey challenged directly several well established aspects of the teaching of reading, including:

- free reading with little or no intervention by the teacher;
- too much time spent hearing individual pupils read;
- the overuse of undemanding and time-consuming worksheets.

The survey identified the weaknesses of the teaching, including:

- insufficient attention to the systematic teaching of an effective programme of phonic knowledge and skills;
- insufficient attention to the development of reading beyond the basic stages, such as the development of pupils' abilities to question, evaluate and respond in depth to what they read;
- the use of too narrow a range of texts (largely narrative fiction), giving pupils insufficient opportunity to encounter progressively more demanding texts, including reference materials;
- insufficient direct and explicit teaching of specific aspects of reading;
- a lack of any detailed analysis of pupils' errors in reading.

At the time of publication these criticisms of the teaching of reading were seen as a broadside assault on the methods used in many English primary schools. Nevertheless, they have been addressed through the establishment of National Curriculum assessment arrangements such as the use of "running records", and within the Framework and teaching approaches of the National Literacy Strategy.

11.3 *The Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban Local Education Authorities*

As with the survey of the teaching of reading, the schools participating in the number survey[69] were mainly in areas of severe socio-economic deprivation, with high proportions of low-income families and high levels of long-term unemployment.

Scores in the National Curriculum tests for mathematics at both key stages in 1995 were below the national averages in two-thirds of the schools. In 1996, however, many of the schools showed significant improvements in their test results. The pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 also took standardised mental and written number tests. Overall, the mental and written test scores of Year 2 pupils were comparable with the national norms, but the Year 6 pupils performed less well and their scores were below those of the national sample.

In a similar picture to that seen in the reading survey, the test scores indicated substantial variation in attainment between schools. This variation indicated that some aspects of number work received too little attention or that they were badly taught. Too many pupils were ill-equipped to work out basic calculations in their heads, and they were slow and often inaccurate when using pencil-and-paper methods.

The performance of pupils from different ethnic groups showed considerable variation. Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils achieved low scores in both Year 2 and Year 6. The small group of Chinese pupils performed well.

The report comments on the cultural acceptance in England of not having a "head for figures", unlike illiteracy, to which a critical social stigma is attached. Nevertheless, despite the fact that, overall, the schools in the survey scored close to the average in the standardised tests, the variations in standards and in the quality of teaching were, as the report states, "too wide and call for urgent attention".

The variation in the quality of the teaching was striking. At best some excellent teaching was seen in all three of the authorities. In contrast, there was some confused and confusing teaching, leading to poor attitudes, and anxieties about number, in many pupils.

Weaknesses in the teaching of number were highlighted in the report, and included:

- in half the lessons at Key Stage 1 and one-third at Key Stage 2, insufficient attention was given to securing the confident recall of number facts;
- in several schools there was no clear expectation that multiplication tables were to be learned by heart;
- "a debilitating overuse of individual work", often linked with an overreliance on worksheets and published schemes, where reliance on individual work isolated pupils in ways which made it difficult for them to receive any sustained, direct teaching;
- inappropriate expectations in terms of the "pitch" of the work and the pace of the lessons, often linked to weaknesses in teachers' curricular knowledge about how to progress number work. Examples of pupils receiving work that was too easy for them far exceeded those where the work was too hard.

There was another side to the coin, however. Good lessons were seen, with positive features including:

- a higher proportion of time spent teaching the class together, often at the start and sometimes at the end of the lesson;
- a well-judged mix of whole-class, group and individual work, developing a common gain in core knowledge and skills and enabling re-inforcement or extension through individual work;
- clear explanations and instructions;
- the teacher's ability to ask relevant questions and engage pupils in exchanges which promoted confidence and familiarity in using mathematical language;
- good modelling of mathematical ideas and knowledge of using simple resources such as a number line;
- an insistence that pupils should learn number facts and tables by heart.

A recognition of the weaknesses to overcome and the strengths on which to build has been a feature of the National Numeracy Project and its wider dissemination as the National Numeracy Strategy. The importance of tracking progress throughout the primary years, rather than just at the end of the key stages, has been acknowledged by the QCA; schools are now offered up-to-date standardised tests to help monitor pupils' progress more systematically and to help teachers plan their work more effectively.

It was encouraging to find that some schools in the survey were at or close to the national targets set by the Government for primary pupils in mathematics for the year 2002. That is to say, 75 per cent of their eleven-year-olds were achieving Level 4 or above in mathematics. While schools serving the areas of social disadvantage generally did less well than those in schools serving more favourable circumstances, this was not the whole story: some schools serving the poorest areas managed to achieve the national target and have done so since national testing began.

11.4 The National Literacy Project

The National Literacy Project was set up by the DfEE in September 1996 and was funded through Grants for Education Support and Training at a cost of £12.5 million over five years. Eighteen local education authorities were involved in the Project, involving initially 266 primary schools. HMI evaluated the Project by visiting a 20 per cent sample of schools.[70] Three visits were made to each school in the sample and over 300 "literacy hours" were observed.

Most of the schools had entered the Project because they had weaknesses in reading and writing, particularly at Key Stage 2. OFSTED inspection reports had also, in many cases, indicated unsatisfactory performance in other key areas, including leadership and management and the monitoring and evaluation of standards of work by both headteachers and subject co-ordinators.

The Project's aims were to raise standards of literacy in primary schools in line with national expectations. It targeted two key areas for improvement:

- the quality of literacy teaching in the classroom;
- the management of literacy throughout the school.

The Project established a detailed Framework of teaching objectives for reading and writing structured as a termly programme based on three levels of work:

- word level: phonics, spelling and vocabulary;
- sentence level: grammar and punctuation;
- text level: comprehension and composition.

The Project also provided guidance on how to teach these three levels of work through a daily literacy hour. Pupils were taught during this time through a mix of whole-class teaching, group teaching and individual work. As part of their work in promoting, managing and monitoring the Project, local education authorities appointed literacy consultants who trained and supported the "key teachers" designated by schools to take the lead in implementing the Project in their schools.

The progress of the pupils in the Project schools was also monitored by the use of nationally standardised tests, taken at the start of the Project in October 1996 and again in March 1998. Pupils also completed a questionnaire to assess their attitudes to reading and to see whether these had changed.

The Project was able to claim some important successes. Teaching improved, and many pupils made good progress. The Project was an important catalyst in the majority of schools in tackling deep-seated problems in literacy. While the picture was mostly positive, some schools remained in a trough of low standards, with only marginal improvement over the first five terms.

The Teaching Framework and the Literacy Hour required focused, direct teaching; both were well received by teachers, who appreciated the clear structure of the Literacy Hour and the detailed teaching objectives of the Framework. The Framework helped to establish demanding and clear expectations for reading and writing in primary schools, an essential precondition to the raising of standards. The Project had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and interest in reading and writing; they recognised the importance of what they were doing and afforded the Literacy Hour a high status.

HMI found that the Project had a clear, positive influence on the teaching of literacy and the test results for pupils in the first cohort of schools indicated that the majority of pupils had improved their reading scores. Nevertheless, HMI also reported that there remained a number of weaknesses in the teaching of literacy, disturbing variations in the standards being achieved in the first cohort of project schools, and insufficient progress being made by a significant minority of schools. These weaknesses were not considered to be intractable, but HMI concluded that if they were to be remedied, they would require:

- stronger leadership in schools where standards had not, thus far, begun to improve. Support from the headteacher was weak in just over one in five schools;
- a faster pace of change in classrooms where the teaching was unsatisfactory;
- a much greater degree of support and a more carefully targeted programme of intervention in the schools with weaknesses in leadership, management and teaching;
- improvements in teachers' knowledge about the teaching of phonics in order to improve the teaching of "word level" work.

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the overall quality of the teaching was at least satisfactory in seven out of eight lessons, and in half of the lessons the teaching was good. The features of the good teaching can be illustrated by reference to the teaching at **Mary Trevelyan Primary School**, Newcastle upon Tyne, a school achieving test results above the national averages from a pupil population with 83 per cent eligibility for free school meals:

> *All teachers are thoroughly well informed teachers of English, confident in their strategies for teaching phonics and spelling and including all aspects of English in demanding lessons. They are very familiar with the Project Framework.*
>
> *All the teachers seen managed the literacy hour extremely skilfully. The class teaching was direct, demanding, involved accurate instruction and engaged all the pupils. Direct teaching was precisely linked to clear objectives. Groups were organised quickly with clear instructions. Pupils were very good at working independently, within a very well organised set of sensible classroom routines.*
>
> *Expectations were universally high, and the Project Framework was helpfully guiding teachers as to where*

to pitch things. This meant, for example, that much greater emphasis on the vocabulary of English (verb, sentence, adverb, for example) was placed with younger pupils; and the blends of letters ("oo" and "at" in a Year 1 lesson, for example) were used earlier than before. Lessons progressed at a good pace, although the Year 5 teacher was frustrated that the pace was not even faster.

A small number of schools in the Project were high-achieving primary schools. Schools with outstanding English test results are understandably reluctant to abandon tried-and-tested good practice. Reference to **St Oswald's RC Primary School**, Newcastle upon Tyne, illustrates the tensions as well as the approach taken. HMI noted:

Appropriate but unusual adaptation of the Project approach to match the particular demands of this high-achieving school. The school is not prepared to discard its previous successful practice which seemed to emphasise depth and quality, features which the school believes could get lost, especially by Year 6 in a 60-minute session.

The school has decided to teach "formally" the literacy hour for two lessons a week at Key Stage 2 and for three lessons a week at Key Stage 1. Other sessions are used for extended writing and other literacy activities, including handwriting and spelling. All the objectives of the Framework are covered; this has proved a very useful checklist for the teachers to ensure that their English scheme of work covers everything.

The school teaches well beyond the Framework, both in level and depth. Its scheme of work has been mapped against the Framework and at least covers it all. The Year 6 teacher plans her English against National Curriculum Level 5, for example.

Given the national concerns about the underachievement of boys, the school has emphasised the need for all pupils to write complex and accurate sentences. An example from a Year 6 boy illustrates their success, included verbatim:

The Telegraph April 30th 1912

UNSINKABLE?

The Telegraph Asked Mr. C. H. Stengel a survivor from the great Titanic accident to write an account on what he felt on the night everything went wrong and here was what he came up with.

It was a cold night on the 14th April 1912 and I, Mr C. H. Stengel, was enjoying a party with my fellow friends from Belfast as an almighty crash interrupted the party. My friends, Maids and I all made our way out of the room we were occupying passing a clock showing us the time... 11:40pm it was almost midnight. I made my way onto the deck and looked around. I heard an announcement saying the ship had struck an iceberg but I thought nothing of this as the ship was unsinkable... wasn't it?! I went back to my room to inform my friends as to what I saw on deck.

There were big blocks of ice falling from the iceberg and I was beginning to get worried... I rounded my friends up and told them to follow me onto the deck, they obeyed me and followed. We passed the stage and I noticed the band were still playing.

I ran towards the lifeboats and attempted to climb in through the crowds of other people but stopped as a badly aimed shot from a pistol just missed me, only to carry on and hit a bystander. I ran back through the crowds of hysterical women screaming and running wildly. I forgot about my friends for the time being so I ran to the stern, kicked off my shoes and dived into the deep blue sea.

The shock of the coldness of the water was amazing and I'm surprised I didn't die on impact, but still I was alive and that's all that mattered for the time being. Bits of ice were falling all about me but, with a bit of luck and great difficulty I avoided them just... I swam round to the front of the boat passing the hysterical crowds and men jumping overboard as I did In a last hope to stay alive.

Waves were lashing against the side of the boat and the stern rose higher and higher into the air. The crashing of the furniture and belongings smashing and tearing could be heard along with the exploding engines.

I was about to give into the mean and unkind Atlantic ocean when I spotted a wooden lifeboat nor far off. I got an adrenalin rush and seemed to find superhuman strength to swim or rather grind out the last few metres toward the small craft but then, I collapsed...

Lucky for me a friend of mine on board the small boat spotted me and reached out to me. She just caught me by the collar as I was sinking along with the ship and she hauled me on board... I was told later I stopped breathing

for a while but thanks to a brave sailor who gave me C.P.R. I survived. I regained consciousness and watched in silent awe and hope the Titanic against a clear black sky with a full moon settled right in the middle of it.

I said a silent prayer for my friends as I watched the Titanic a 66000 ton monstrosity tilt back even further until it was at a right angle with the water.

A strange force made me turn away and I wept hoping at some moment I would be pinched by someone and wake up but this was no dream or even nightmare. It was really happening and there was nothing I could do to change the events of the last few hours of hell.

I turned around to face the ship one more time, just as it sank below the water and there was an eerie moment of silence apart from the sucking of the water as it was sucked down along with the Titanic and many people to nothingness.

I would never forget that night as long as I live and every night since I have prayed to God to thank him for sparing my life from the cruelness of the sea.

Mr. C. H. Stengel was one of about 850 people who survived the terrible tragedy of the Titanic from the 2228 who sailed in her. At about 6:00am the same day the Titanic sunk the Carpathia a lifeboat arrived but it was to late.

The gains made by some groups of pupils in schools across the Project, as measured in reading scores, were greater than others; for example, girls recorded greater gains than boys, pupils eligible for free school meals made smaller gains than those who were not eligible; and pupils at advanced stages of the special educational needs Code of Practice made smaller gains than pupils with no defined special need. This finding indicates that the Project did not offer a completely watertight solution to the real challenge of the English system, namely the underachievement of boys in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

Even after five terms, the rates of progress made by some schools were still not good enough. In the sample of schools visited by HMI, nearly one-third of the Year 6 age groups made less progress than the national average.

The dissemination and implementation of the Project, as with the National Literacy Strategy, relied on the "cascade" model of training. This placed a heavy responsibility on the key teachers, most of whom performed well. But the cascade model only works if the key teachers have the necessary skills and resources, and the support of the headteacher.

The contribution of the consultants was generally good and sometimes outstanding. Most developed an impressive range of skills, essential to sustaining the impetus of the work. Their role has been very demanding indeed, particularly when facing headteachers who were reluctant or unable to implement the Project in their school.

In most local education authorities the support for the consultants was at least satisfactory, and several effective literacy centres and literacy steering groups were set up. In three of the 18 authorities, however, the promotion and management of the Project never fully recovered from an unsatisfactory start because of poor internal communication and a lack of coherent strategies for linking the Project to other priorities. It was at the level of the individual school that the local education authority support was weakest, particularly in those schools which required the most help because they were not making enough progress.

Teachers found it difficult to organise the group-work element of the literacy hour in such a way that they were free to teach one or two of the groups, while the other groups undertook worthwhile tasks rather than low-level "holding" activities: at worst, wordsearches and colouring exercises.

Most schools worked hard to ensure there were adequate resources for the teaching of the literacy hour. Often, this meant diverting money from one priority to literacy in order to increase the stocks of books, particularly "big books" and sets of books used in "guided reading" sessions.

11.5 The National Numeracy Project

Two hundred and thirty-three primary schools set about implementing the National Numeracy Project.[71] Over one-fifth of these were located in inner London and a further 46 per cent in metropolitan areas. They were generally in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and the performance of the "numeracy schools" was generally lower compared to schools nationally.

The Project was well received in the vast majority of the schools. In many schools the introduction of the Project's Framework for Teaching Mathematics, with its detailed planning requirements and well-defined learning objectives, required a major change. The quality of planning for mathematics quickly improved and teachers found the Framework structure very helpful,

especially in mixed-age classes. The level of detail offered by the Framework was welcomed by teachers working with pupils with special educational needs.

The initial requirement to devote at least four 50-minute lessons a week to numeracy was implemented speedily. For some schools, this involved allocating more time to mathematics than before, and in a few this was reportedly at the expense of other subjects.

The audit process, which included the identification of targets and how to address them, helped many schools to raise their expectations of what pupils could achieve in mathematics. Many headteachers found target setting difficult, and in about one-third of schools the targets had an insufficiently strong emphasis on standards. In a significant minority of schools, expectations were too low and were unduly influenced by teachers' perceptions of the effects of pupils' backgrounds.

Most schools had sufficient resources to support the Project and were able to fund non-contact time for the co-ordinator and key teachers. As with the literacy project, problems emerged for schools with a high turnover of staff, particularly where new co-ordinators needed to be trained or supply teachers needed to be informed about the Project.

The quality of the teaching improved during the life of the Project and by the end was satisfactory or better in four-fifths of the lessons observed, although the figure of one in five lessons in which the teaching was unsatisfactory is high.

The amount of detailed and systematic planning required by the Project was considerable, and teachers found this to be very time-consuming.

The Project had a positive impact on the teaching of mathematics. Effective direct teaching was evident in most lessons, although not always sufficiently sustained. In particular, many teachers lacked confidence in using questions with the whole class. Teachers began to use the oral work and mental calculation activities as opportunities to develop a much more informed view of pupils' strengths and weaknesses.

Most pupils showed a positive attitude to the mathematics lessons, although their response to the introductory oral work and mental calculations was generally better than the demands of staying on task in the middle part of the lesson. Pupils often lost concentration when they were not working directly with the teacher.

The quality of the training for the teachers has been one of the crucial determinants of success. Again, as with the National Literacy Project, the quality of the headteacher's leadership and management and the status given to the Project have also been strongly associated with its success or failure at school level. Some schools clearly needed greater support than others from consultants and the local education authority in order to improve the quality of teaching and manage change.

11.6 Summer Literacy Schools

In 1997, 1,600 pupils took part in Summer Literacy Schools in 50 schools. In 1998, the scheme was extended considerably, involving over 16,000 pupils in approximately 500 schools. The aim was to improve the reading and writing skills of pupils on entry to Year 7 and help prepare them for the challenge of the secondary school curriculum. Summer schools formed part of the National Literacy Strategy and were expected to use the good practice described in the strategy. The pupils targeted were mostly those working at Level 3; in other words, not those one in ten pupils, largely boys, who fail to reach Level 3 in English.

Typically, the schemes involved 30 pupils from the feeder primary schools of a secondary school. The teachers involved were usually secondary school staff, often from the English or special needs departments. Most schools ran for five hours a day, with structured literacy activities during the morning and a range of sporting, technology or drama activities in the afternoon.

The strengths of the scheme included:

- a sense of shared purpose, with highly motivated pupils and good relationships between teachers and pupils;
- generally good co-ordination of the scheme,
  and careful monitoring by the local education authority;
- good teaching in half of the lessons observed by HMI, and satisfactory teaching in a further 35 per cent of lessons;
- good planning of literacy-related work, generally linked to the Framework for teaching.

Weaknesses included:

- inadequate assessment information from the feeder primary schools;
- some lack of knowledge of the National Literacy Strategy approach on behalf of the secondary school staff involved;
- a minority of reluctant staff, or a lack of continuity because of the use of a great many part-time staff;
- occasional overuse of worksheets or computer programs, reducing the amount of teaching of key literacy skills.

In summary, the vast majority of the Summer Literacy Schools were successful in meeting their objectives and provided good value for money. The quality of literacy teaching, the range of activities and the response of the pupils were all good features in these schools. In a few schools there were weak elements in the provision, mostly associated with too little training and preparation and a limited understanding of the principles and practice of the National Literacy Strategy. These lessons have been taken to heart and incorporated into the guidance for summer school providers in 1999, linking summer schools much more closely to the National Literacy Strategy.

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65 See, for example, *Worlds Apart? A Review of International Surveys of Educational Achievement involving England,* David Reynolds and Shaun Farrell, OFSTED, 1996.

66*Third International Mathematics and Science Study*. NFER, 1996 and 1997.

67*Access and Achievement in Urban Education: A report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools*. HMSO, 1993.

68 *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1996.

69*The Teaching of Number in Three Inner-urban Local Education Authorities*. OFSTED, 1997.

70*The National Literacy Project. An HMI Evaluation*. OFSTED, 1998.

71*The National Numeracy Project. An HMI Evaluation*. OFSTED, 1998.

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Chapter 13
SCHOOLS WITH SERIOUS WEAKNESSES AND THOSE REQUIRING SPECIAL MEASURES

13.1 Introduction

Since the first inspection of schools according to the Framework for the Inspection of Schools, about 3 per cent (474 to the end of 1997/98) have been put into special measures and about 8 per cent have been found to have serious weaknesses. As a result of being put into special measures the schools have, in almost all cases, made good progress and very significantly improved the quality of the education that they provide for their pupils.

Primary schools subject to special measures are found in the full range of types and contexts of primary schools. Just over one-third are in urban areas where there is an obvious degree of social and economic disadvantage. But schools in suburban and rural areas are also found to be underperforming and when judged against the stated criteria they too are found to require special measures. Small rural schools in some counties form a large proportion of failing schools.

13.2 Standards of achievement

The characteristics of failing primary schools encompass all the criteria published in the annex of the Framework for the Inspection of Schools,[77] but low attainment and slow progress of pupils, together with unsatisfactory teaching and leadership, feature more prominently than the rest. In the reports of almost all schools in special measures, there is a reference to low standards of achievement. Most frequently the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are mentioned and, within those, attainment in literacy and numeracy are increasingly quoted. Low standards at Key Stage 2 are cited more often than low standards at Key Stage 1 or in early years classes.

The pupils' progress is judged by the gains in knowledge and skills that they make over time, as indicated in written work or records of progress or in the lessons observed during the inspection. In primary schools in special measures, the percentage of lessons where satisfactory progress is made is frequently less than 75 per cent. The criteria for consideration of failure include reference to the progress of distinct groups of pupils. The two groups most commonly quoted are pupils who have special educational needs and boys. Judgements about the progress of pupils who have special needs encompass the accuracy of the diagnosis of need and the appropriateness of the provision. A common cause of failure is the very slow progress made by pupils whose needs and provision are left entirely to the class teacher. In this respect, they often have too low expectations of progress.

13.3 Attitudes and behaviour

Negative attitudes to learning and poor levels of behaviour are often associated with pupils making insufficient progress. Obvious signs of poor discipline may well be in the form of unruly and disruptive behaviour, but there may also be considerable quiet restlessness in class, where concentration is difficult and engagement in work is low. Quantitative evidence of poor behaviour and attitudes is increasingly expressed in the numbers of exclusions, unauthorised absence and unexplained lateness.

13.4 The quality of teaching

Invariably in primary schools made subject to special measures there is criticism of the quality of teaching. This is the touchstone of the acceptability of a school's provision. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in failing schools can reach very high levels. The great majority of the weaknesses in the teaching include: inappropriate pitch of work; inefficient use of time; poor assessment of the pupils' progress; and weak lesson planning. These factors are often related to weak subject knowledge, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Poor presentational and organisational skills result in low engagement and poor progress of the pupils. In some schools, difficulties in recruitment and retention of teachers lead to discontinuity and fragmentation of learning.

13.5 Management and leadership

Ineffective leadership frequently features in reports of failing primary schools. Inadequate direction, unclear delegation, vague task and target setting, low levels of monitoring, weak analysis of the school's position, and a passive involvement by governors are the most commonly cited descriptions of weak leadership and management. This is manifest in low morale and poor motivation of staff, lack of teamwork and commitment, and inadequate implementation of the National Curriculum.

13.6 The improvement process

The improvement process starts with the recognition of weakness and the willingness to act urgently and vigorously to improve the school. The progress of some schools has been hindered by a reluctance to accept the inspection findings and a continued denial of failure. The positive attitude of the staff, led by the headteacher, is critical to restoration.

13.7 The action plan

The next important step is the preparation of the action plan. This provides a school with an opportunity to involve the staff in a review of the school's position and to set new shared goals. Clear, practical and manageable strategies for the achievement of those goals are at the heart of a good action plan. Schools where improvement is readily marked have action plans where priorities are clear, responsibilities for parts of the plan are assigned, targets and success criteria are set, and there is effective monitoring and evaluation. Clarity is often reflected in the link between the action proposed and the intended outcome. Occasionally, priorities can be muddled and objectives blurred in the welter of information contained in the plan. It has been important that teachers, governors, local education authority personnel and headteachers all recognise where their contribution fits into the whole plan and how their effectiveness can be recognised and valued.

The setting of quantitative targets is an important yet difficult aspect of action plans. Many schools are rightly keen to set high targets for improved attainment, but they do not want either to be overambitious or to set their sights too low. Target setting has been given added significance with the advent of local education authority and school targets for improved attainment. Where the targets are firmly rooted in the actual performance of pupils, teachers have been able to relate more closely to the objectives and pupils have been more likely to reach the target levels. Teachers also find that targets set as stages of the improvement process are helpful. The coverage and learning of key scientific knowledge or a particular reading skill at certain points of the year, for example, provide the teacher with a clear map for improvement and the recognition of work successfully completed.

13.8 Improving management

The progress of a school in special measures is firmly linked to the quality of leadership and management. Strong leadership by the headteacher is the most prominent feature of primary schools that make good progress while in special measures. Questions are asked at an early stage about the capacity of the incumbent headteacher to lead the school's required improvement. In many cases new headteachers are quickly appointed to failing schools. In some instances this is undertaken with the temporary appointment or the secondment of another headteacher from within the local education authority; these are frequently experienced and successful headteachers. A new appointment often helps in the gaining of a fresh and unprejudiced perception and in generating increased impetus for change. This, in turn, leads to changes in staff and the revision of roles and responsibilities.

Incumbent headteachers can also improve. Where clear and detailed guidance and support have been given to the headteacher for example by the local education authority or other external agencies effective leadership has ensued. This has taken the form of additional training focused on managerial and organisational skills, close monitoring by the local education authority,

in-school support in the form of a consultant headteacher, and a personal action plan specifying tasks and targets for improvement in the headteacher's work.

A key feature in developing the management of the school is the extent to which systems and procedures are built to ensure continued and lasting effectiveness. In this respect, self-evaluation of the school's performance can make a significant contribution. Where this is undertaken rigorously and honestly, clear gains have been made. The key ingredient is the knowledge and drive of the headteacher in setting appropriate expectations of teaching and attainment.

Just as the school's reaction to the initial inspection report is crucial to the improvement process, so too is its response to subsequent monitoring visits. Where careful note is made of the evaluations of progress on each key issue and action is geared to address specific points, success generally follows. This occasionally entails altering the emphasis or focus of the school's work.

13.9 Improving behaviour

Even if it is not a key issue in the inspection report, many primary schools choose to improve behaviour as a matter of priority. They recognise that the gaining of a calm and studious classroom is a necessary prerequisite to improving learning and achievement. Frequently, behaviour policies are developed or revised and more consistent application of new rules is sought. In some schools the enforcement of a new code of behaviour has led to a sharp increase in the number of pupils excluded for short periods of time before they learn what is expected of them and settle down to improve their behaviour. In many schools the improved behaviour of pupils is the first and most tangible achievement identified, and this is important at a time when teachers are anxious to see early signs of success.

13.10 Improving teaching

Improving the quality of teaching can take longer. Planning is often the first aspect to be worked on in order to specify in some detail what needs to be taught at the varying stages. From this the teachers are encouraged to write detailed lesson plans with particular emphasis given to framing learning intentions more precisely. In some cases, the objectives, content and approaches are prescribed by the school and are implemented rigorously by the teachers. This, with some schools, is based on the structure and planning formats developed by the National Literacy and Numeracy Projects. When this is accompanied by effective training and support, there has been marked improvement in the quality of teaching. This is related to increased understanding of what is to be taught and what outcomes can reasonably be expected from the majority of pupils in the class. This in turn is related to more confident teaching, in which more time and attention can be given to listening to, and building on, the responses of the pupils.

13.11 Raising standards of achievement

Improving the pupils' attainment is the prime aim of schools requiring special measures and this is the crucial measure against which they are ultimately judged. Raising standards, however, can be a slow and difficult process.

Time and again schools some in the most difficult of contexts have demonstrated that achievement from a very low base can be improved significantly. Many headteachers and teachers have been heard to say in the initial stages of special measures that many aspects of the school's work can be changed but they doubt whether standards can be lifted. Yet, often the pupils' achievements have overtaken national averages and expectations. This progress has been gained through much detailed work in planning, monitoring and assessment. Particular attention has been given to the key skills of literacy, oracy, numeracy and information technology. This has frequently entailed a change of culture in the school to focusing on the direct and explicit teaching of knowledge, understanding and skills. This does not imply a narrowing or impoverishment of the primary curriculum. On the contrary, this focus has given a large number of pupils the chance to have greater access to a wider range of activities and a clear sense of success.

13.12 The contribution of governors

Governors have helped schools in special measures by contributing to and supporting the plans for change. Strong, well-organised governing bodies are a common feature of schools that make good progress. As with headteachers, changes of chairmanship quite often follow the designation of special measures and this may precede a revision of the whole membership of the governing body. The local education authority often appoints additional governors who have experience and skill in

management and finance. Most governing bodies have developed effective committees for planning developments in the curriculum, personnel, finance and buildings. This is often accompanied by the delegation of subject responsibility to individual governors, who then visit and report on the subject to the governing body. Governors are generally slower, however, in developing effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's overall progress.

13.13 The work of the local education authority

Most local education authorities provide sound support for their schools which are subject to special measures, but there is considerable variation in the manner and effect of this support. In almost all schools, much help is given with the preparation of the school's action plan. The local education authorities, through their statements of action, say what they will do to help the school. In this they may commit personnel, money and training to the school. Relatively few schools have their delegated budget withdrawn following the designation of special measures, but some local education authorities do this as a matter of policy. In future, local education authorities will be required to have regard to the Code of Practice on LEASchool Relations, which does not allow them to withdraw budgets as a matter of policy but only on a case-by-case basis. Depending on a school's needs, local education authorities often provide subject-specific help in the form of training, which is followed up by practical school-based work from advisory teachers. This help is usually highly valued by the teachers.

The monitoring and evaluation of a school's progress is a major responsibility of the local education authority. It is carried out with varying degrees of success. The best practice is found where a knowledgeable and skilful inspector relates closely to the role of the headteacher, visits regularly and provides detailed, practical advice for sustained improvement. Success is also achieved when the managerial advice is accompanied by support for teachers, mostly through the provision of practical advice from advisory teachers. A major challenge to the local education authority is in its ability to give support without encouraging dependence. The local education authority is rigorously held to account for the commitments made in the initial planning for the school's improvement.

13.14 Coming out of special measures

The work that many headteachers, staff, governors, parents, pupils and others have put into their schools to turn them from failure to success must not be underestimated. It has been those primary schools that have been determined to act quickly and decisively to bring about improvement that have made the best progress. Looking for excuses and someone to blame only hinder progress and limit improvement. Most primary schools have improved and have been removed from special measures within two years; indeed, some have reached this goal significantly more quickly.

The transformation in some schools has been quite remarkable, with provision that was poor changing to become good, unsatisfactory teaching replaced by teaching that is all sound or good, and weak leadership replaced by strong and visionary educational direction. If there has been poor behaviour, the new attitudes, enthusiasm for learning and self-discipline have made the schools pleasant places in which to learn rather than ones to avoid.

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77 *Guidance on the Inspection of Nursery and Primary Schools*. OFSTED, 1995.

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ANNEX 1: THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR EDUCATION[80]

The education system in England is to a large extent governed by Acts of Parliament and related Statutory Instruments. The years before the first full inspection cycle brought an unprecedented amount of reforming legislation, largely enshrined in the Education Reform Act 1988. This Act established the subjects of the National Curriculum and the local management of schools. Issues of accountability were taken further than before through the publication of national test results, the publication of performance tables, and published inspection reports on every maintained primary school in England. The principles and frameworks laid down in successive Acts from 1944 onwards are consolidated in two recent Acts: the Education Act 1996 and the School Inspections Act 1996.

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) administers the statutory framework that governs the education system, establishes national education policies and works with other central and local government bodies in the implementation of those policies. Advice is provided by Government departments and also by non-departmental public bodies such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (formerly SCAA and NCVQ).

Central Government provides the bulk of the finance for the education system, but it is largely administered by local education authorities and the governing bodies of individual schools and colleges. The Funding Agency for Schools is responsible for administering the payment of grants to grant maintained schools; however, by 1998 there were only 502 grant maintained schools, serving 3 per cent of the pupil population.

OFSTED is a non-ministerial government department established in September 1992 by the Education (Schools) Act 1992, now consolidated into the School Inspections Act 1996. OFSTED is headed by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), the first of whom was Professor Stewart Sutherland; after Professor Sutherland's return to Scotland, the post of HMCI has been held by Chris Woodhead. HMCI is responsible for securing the inspection of schools; for the registration of inspectors; and for advising the Secretary of State on all aspects of the quality of education and school standards.

The secular curriculum of all maintained schools is inspected by registered inspectors under contract to OFSTED. However, in schools in which denominational religious education takes place, this, and in some circumstances collective worship, must be inspected by a person chosen by the governing body rather than OFSTED.

Much of the evidence in this report is drawn from the substantial database constructed from the first cycle of inspections carried out under the legislation of 1992 and 1996; such inspections are usually referred to as "Section 9" (now Section 10) inspections. Denominational education, inspected separately and not reported on here, comes under "Section 13" (now Section 23).

Much of what happens in schools has been influenced by recent legislation. This legislation inevitably forms the backdrop to much of this report. The principal influences have been on the following.

The characteristics of the school

- **Admissions:** parents have the right to express a preference as to the school at which they wish their children to attend, and local education authorities and governing bodies must try to meet these preferences.
- **Charging** for admission and education in all maintained schools is prohibited, but there are some exceptions such as individual musical tuition and board and lodging on residential visits.
- **Special educational need provision:** schools must pay regard to the Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs. Where a child has been assessed as needing special provision determined by a statement, the local education authority must make and maintain a statement for that child and review it annually.

Aspects of the school

- **Results of pupils' attainments**. Schools must publish the school and national results of the National Curriculum assessments in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science of seven-year-olds and eleven-year-olds. Schools must also provide at least annually a **written report to parents**, giving details of progress in all subjects and of attainment in nationally assessed subjects.

- **The National Curriculum** applies only to pupils of statutory school age. Maintained schools must teach the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education, and the curriculum must be broad and balanced.

- The overall number of **lesson hours** per week is not prescribed, although guidance is given. Good practice is taken to be 21 hours for pupils aged 57 and 23.5 hours for pupils aged 811.

- **Religious education** in LEA maintained schools (and generally in controlled schools) must be taught in accordance with a locally agreed syllabus. Parents can withdraw their child from all or part of religious education.

- Schools must provide for all pupils to attend a daily act of **collective worship**, which over a term must be broadly Christian in character. Parents may withdraw their child from collective worship. Schools may apply to the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education for a determination that the requirement for Christian collective worship should not apply in the case of the school or any class or description of pupils.

The management and efficiency of the school

Governors have a general responsibility for the effective management of the school within the framework of national legislation and, in the case of local education authority maintained schools, of local education authority policies. Detailed decisions about the day-to-day running of the school are the responsibility of the headteacher.

The duties of governors now include:

- establishing, with the headteacher, the aims and policies of the school and how standards can be improved;

- helping to draw up the school development plan;

- advising on spending the budget;

- ensuring that the National Curriculum and religious education are taught;

- selecting the headteacher, and appointing, promoting, supporting and disciplining other staff;

- acting as a link between the school and the community;

- drawing up the post-inspection action plan and monitoring how that plan is put into practice.

Local education authorities must maintain schemes under which delegated budgets apply to all LEA maintained schools.

The role and duties of local education authorities

The period 199498 was one in which the roles of local education authorities changed, were increasingly defined and came under public scrutiny. Local education authorities must maintain schemes under which all county and maintained schools have delegated budgets. The Funding Agency for Schools is responsible for administering the payment of grants to grant maintained schools. The accounts of schools with delegated budgets are subject to regular internal audit and must be available for inspection as necessary by local education authorities' external auditors.

Towards the end of the inspection cycle the role of the local education authority was more closely defined in terms of intervention, which should be "in inverse proportion to success" and has been established as a primary role for local education authorities. These responsibilities are now set out in education development plans which include, for example, their progress towards meeting performance targets in their schools, targets for reducing exclusions and unauthorised absences, approaches to tackling schools causing concern, and their plans for implementing national strategies such as that for literacy.

80 This chapter draws principally on *School Inspection: a guide to the law,* OFSTED, November 1997, and *School Governors: A guide to the law,* DfEE, 1997.

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