



Teachers' response to curriculum reforms: Primary

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Executive Summary

Schoolzone has carried out a series of consultations amongst Primary school teachers to understand how they feel about the new Primary curriculum. The initial reaction to the literacy, maths and science programmes of study was overwhelmingly negative. Senior leaders feared that they would be detrimental to children's development, describing them as out of date, inflexible and irrelevant. They felt the draft curriculum lacked credibility, and placed too much emphasis on knowledge acquisition, at the expense of creativity, and that rote learning would take the place of the skills of discovery and exploration.

However, over the past 18 months, attitudes have shifted.

On the whole, teachers (or at least those who are taking part in our consultations!) are now much more positive about the change. They're looking forward to the challenge of designing their own curriculum, revising or replacing their schemes of work, and trying new approaches. They're embracing the freedom to focus on their school's needs.

In contrast to the initial response, teachers now feel that the new curriculum offers greater opportunities for creativity, and not only are teachers planning on retaining the 'creative curriculum', but those who had a more traditional approach previously see this as an opportunity to move towards a more creative, topic based approach.

The old QCA schemes are finally being replaced (or so they say...).

In terms of assessment, most intend to continue using the National Curriculum levels to track and monitor progress, although these will now need to be aligned with the new curriculum. Amongst those using APP, this will also continue.

Teachers have yet to engage with the new measures, and none have considered, let alone started to plan, how they will meet the new 'floor standards' that 85% of pupils reach a 'secondary-ready'. Similarly, they haven't taken on board that if a baseline assessment is introduced for five year olds, this will mean showing value added in the KS2 SATs.

Overall, the general mood is one of excitement coupled with anxiety over the amount of work they have ahead.

How prepared are they?

This curriculum rollout differs from previous curriculum updates/ literacy & numeracy strategies in that although the official launch date is September 2014, the 'small print' suggests a soft launch. Schools currently have the freedom to stop teaching the current curriculum in Y3 & 4 for English, Maths and Science, and for all Foundation subjects. The reasoning behind this is that these will be the first year groups to take the new SATS tests. Conversely they should continue teaching the current curriculum to Y2 and Y6 in September 2014, as these cohorts will take the old SATs tests. The reality is that with the first SATs tests set for May 2016, this will determine schools' own timelines, and currently there is little sense of urgency amongst schools to meet the September 2014 implementation date.

The current level of preparedness varies considerably: some are still at the auditing stage, identifying gaps in their current curriculum.

Most have set up subject teams, led by the coordinator or subject leader, who is coordinating the process, overseeing the writing of medium term plans across the year groups, and delivering CPD to other members of staff.

A few have started rolling out the new maths curriculum.

Several have either attended training days, or would be doing so shortly.

Most will be phasing in the new curriculum, rather than switching over completely in September. However, the forum participants didn't seem to be prioritising rollout amongst the first cohorts to take the new SATS in May 2016, i.e. current Y4 and Y3. This may be because they are taking a holistic approach to planning the Programmes of Study; it may be because they haven't thought this far ahead...

Teachers have mixed feelings about launching their new curricula from September, with most feeling daunted by the amount still to do. Although they welcome the opportunity to interpret the curriculum in line with their own needs, they feel that they are working in a vacuum. Primary school teachers seldom start with a blank sheet of paper, hence the success of sites such as the TES: they prefer to take what others have done, and adapt this for their own purposes. This new curriculum is pushing them out of their comfort zone, as it requires a big cultural shift for all but the most innovative and confident schools.

In spite of the expectation that schools will be working collaboratively with others in their cluster or teaching school alliance, in this forum we've seen little evidence of this happening. Collaboration seems to be predominantly within the school, rather than amongst groups of schools.

Overall, most schools still have a long way to go, and the path ahead is not particularly clear to them yet.

Resourcing needs

None of the participants were aware of any financial or budgeting provision to support the rollout of the new curriculum.

Teachers said that they had started to audit their resources to identify gaps; some were feeling panicky over the volume of resources that needed replacing, with limited time and money in hand.

In this forum, teachers are not thinking particularly strategically about resourcing. With the new floor standards linked to KS2 SATS, teachers should be focusing their budgets and time on reading, writing and maths. This is not the case: ICT, history and MFL are the three subjects teachers are most concerned about.

The new focus in ICT on coding rather than on skills is a particular challenge for teachers. Not only do they feel the need to invest in software packages, but many are also looking at new hardware.

With regards to history, many teachers had previously relied on local museums and charities for materials; they felt that they would need to replace many of these and fill in gaps in teachers' knowledge. It seems likely that history may lag behind other subjects in terms of implementing the new curriculum.

One teacher noted that publishers needed to support teachers as well as students in the provision of new resources.

One teacher mentioned the possibility of optimising economies of scale by bulk purchasing resources with partner schools, but we've seen very little evidence of this; the logistics of putting this in place for most schools would negate the relatively small cost savings.

Linking training with resources is a model that teachers seem positive about, with Espresso being commended by a number of teachers for the excellent quality of their training on coding.

However, there is a perception amongst teachers that publishers have been slow to respond to the new curriculum. There is also a legacy of distrust: many teachers turned to publishers at the last curriculum change, only to be disappointed with the quality of the materials they had bought. Although this wasn't particularly evident from this consultation, we are seeing greater evidence of primary schools becoming more rigorous in their approach towards resource purchasing, with senior leaders requiring evidence of impact. This carries far greater weight when it is based on feedback from other schools (particularly those with a similar demographic profiling to their own) than from the

publisher. Publishers may find themselves in a no win loop when it comes to launching new programmes, where without the evidence from other user schools, teachers may be wary of buying into the schemes.

Bearing in mind that teachers turn to a few, highly respected independent trainers such as Chris Quigley for support, their endorsement would carry greater kudos and weight than publishers' brands.

Assessment

At the time of carrying out this research, the following changes had been proposed to the way in which primary schools assess and track pupils' progress:

- National curriculum levels will be removed and not replaced.
- Instead the new NC PoS set out what pupils should be taught by the end of each key stage.
- There will be no prescribed system for ongoing assessment and reporting: schools will create or choose their own.
- There will be optional baseline testing for four to five year olds; otherwise baseline testing will be used at the start of KS1.
- SATs at KS1 and 2 will continue, but be more demanding – new versions used in summer 2016.
- SATs results will be scaled and compared to the national cohort and league tables will report progress compared to baseline.
- Floor standards (used to trigger an Ofsted inspection) will be at a "much higher level" with an expectation that 85% of pupils reach "secondary-ready standard".

The results of the consultation, released at the end of March (see Appendix), confirm the following changes:

- The introduction of 'more challenging' tests that will measure pupils according to a scaled score.
- Parents will see their own child's score alongside the average for the school, the local area, and nationally.
- The floor standard will be based on two measures: pupils will need to make 'sufficient progress' by KS2. The baseline measure for this will be based either on the reception baseline (for 'all-through' primaries) or from their KS1 SATs score (if a junior/ middle school) OR at least 85% of pupils will need to achieve the equivalent of level 4b in their KS2 SATs results.

Schools can meet **either** the progress **or** the attainment floor standard.

This is good news for schools in difficult catchment areas, where pupils start school with very poorly developed skills. For them, the emphasis will be on meeting the value-added (progress) targets, with the 85% target remaining 'aspirational'.

It is also good news for primary schools in leafy suburbs, which could presumably show no value added at all, but still be exempt from an Ofsted inspection providing 85% of children meet the required standard in reading and maths tests, and are assessed by their teacher as reaching the new standards in writing.

In either case, there is a strong incentive for schools to make their baseline testing as rigorous as possible.

We speculated over the likelihood of schools being 'rewarded' for helping the most socially disadvantaged children, and wondered whether the pupil premium funding might be linked to baseline assessments (given that the two are mentioned together in the consultation document), rather than the current slightly arbitrary FSM criterion, with those whose pupils achieve the lowest baseline assessment scores being given the biggest pupil premium grant. However, as yet there is no announcement, although from September 2014, pupil premium funding is weighted towards primary schools.

According to the Report of the NAHT Commission on Assessment¹, there is likely to be a 'mixed economy' in most schools as they see their current pupils through the final years of this system. This is indeed the case, with teachers in this consultation and others we've done saying that they will continue to use NC levels, along with other systems they've evolved or adopted such as 'I can' statements, or APP. These softer measures are in line with the recommendations in the NAHT report which says that 'Pupil progress and achievement should be communicated in terms of descriptive profiles rather than numerical summaries'.

None are yet evolving or adopting new assessment system. The NAHT recommends developing consistent criteria for assessment, and proposes developing these criteria themselves. This will 'help to repair the disjointed nature of assessment through all ages, from 2-19'.

At primary school, the softer formative assessment measures are likely to be a familiar process. However, teachers have not yet considered the implications of a baseline assessment linked to floor standards for SATs outcomes, nor the effect of higher demands of the new curriculum.

Teachers will need to become far more adept at tracking the progress of pupils against their own predicted grades, and comparing progress of their children against national and local averages and communicating this to parents, children, staff, and other schools. Very few are currently working collaboratively to ensure a consistent approach to assessment, and to share data.

Teachers in this consultation were sceptical about the use of commercial assessment programmes. Those with experience of using external packages such as the NFER optional tests felt that the results were unreliable; overall teachers queried the ability of providers to genuinely understand the curriculum, and offer the required rigour.

More work is needed from assessment providers to build trust and confidence in their products, and overcome resistance to automarked computer based assessments.

Teachers seemed aware of the need to track the progress of their pupil premium children, although none mentioned linking investment in interventions / resources against the performance of these children, possibly because of the difficulty of establishing this link.

Compulsory requirement to teach another language

Nearly all the teachers who answered the questions about teaching another language at KS2 said that they already taught French to their pupils, because this was the language supported by their local secondary school. Two thirds of the respondents said that classroom teachers would be responsible for language lessons; a prospect that clearly daunted some of the participants.

Around half of schools will be looking for new MFL resources, although those lacking specialist teachers are in a bit of a resourcing trap as they lack the expertise to evaluate the quality and suitability of the programmes, although these are precisely the schools most in need of a structured, easy-to-follow programme.

Next steps

Teachers are waking up to the reality of needing to start rolling out the new curriculum, and are beginning to look at resourcing gaps.

¹ <http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/assessment/profession-takes-lead-on-assessment-after-the-end-of-levels/>

Although some schools are further advanced with regards to 'curriculum readiness', there seems to be little evidence of schools working collaboratively to share plans, schemes of work and assessment practices. By identifying those schools which are ahead of the game, and which are deemed 'outstanding' by Ofsted, publishers could support this collaborative process, and at the same time, put their resources at the front of the queue when schools start buying in new resources.

It's inevitable that schools will run out of time, so working with outstanding schools and jointly publishing editable schemes of work/ medium term/ short term plans in an editable format would be enormously valuable to less confident schools looking for a model on which to base their own curriculum.

CPD and training is another key opportunity for publishers and content providers. Again, the shift between this and previous curriculum changes is that the training needs to be led by recognised 'experts' rather than in house publishing specialists.

Research into the topics generally being retained by schools, and those being replaced, would be useful both for publishers, and also for schools which themselves are lacking confidence in making these choices.

Support and guidance on new teaching sequences, based again on good practice, would be extremely helpful for teachers anxious that staff may fall back on familiar strategies rather than the most effective ones. Focusing on investigations, problem solving, creative ways of tackling some of the more traditional skills of SPaG and mental maths would be a good starting point. Assessment is another area of need, and advice from publishers on 'what an objective looks like in terms of children's work/ tasks' will be highly sought after.

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Methodology

A forum was set up with 6 sub-forums, and 18 questions in total. Topics covered were: overall thoughts about the new curriculum, assessment measures, addition of a second language and CPD.

Profile of Participants

TYPE OF SCHOOLS

- 11 Local Authority schools
- 3 Voluntary Aided schools
- 1 Independent school
- 1 Academy school

REGION

Participants came from Primary schools across the country: 2 from the East, 4 from the East Midlands, 2 from London, 4 from the South East, 2 from Wales, 1 from the West Midlands and 1 from Yorkshire.

JOB POSITION

- 6 Deputy Headteachers
- 3 Subject co-ordinators
- 1 Head of Year
- 6 Teachers

SUBJECT SPECIALISM

4 different subjects were covered: English, Maths, Science and ICT.

Findings

General Content

PREPARATION

The majority of teachers said they felt excited at the prospect of putting a new curriculum into place, although most admitted that a lot more preparation was needed.

"I think the level of preparedness at the whole school level can have a real impact on the individual...if systems are in place then it can be much less daunting"

The key issue, unsurprisingly, was the scale of the task involved, with teachers flagging up the time it took to plan and research the structure of their new curriculum, and then start ordering the necessary resources. Importantly, however, compared with previous consultations with teachers, the overall mood has shifted from one of concern and apprehension, to anticipation and a sense of opportunities afforded by developing a new curriculum.

"I think it will give us more freedom to teach to our school's needs".

Most respondents described a collaborative process, with teams led by subject leaders working together to create programmes of study.

Progress varied amongst the participants, with some saying that their school was just starting the process, while others were clearly further advanced.

There were various measures put forward as to how this preparation was being achieved, such as conducting audits across the school to help identify areas for development; the creation of a school wide topic map using History, Geography and Science topics, alongside the use of teams to create programmes of study to ensure coverage, progression and rigour; and the purchase of new resources to supplement the new curriculum.

A few of the teachers talked in further detail about the sources they are referring to, to seek guidance and advice. These included the LA, Chris Quigley consultancy, The Key, and Oxford Owl, although only one mentioned receiving support from their local authority.

ADVANTAGES

The teachers listed a number of advantages of which they felt the new curriculum would bring to their schools. The main advantage appears to be that the introduction of a fresh, new teaching framework will be a welcome change, allowing for new challenges.

"...change is to be embraced. There is the opportunity to try new things, take on new challenges and not get to September churning out the same old QCA schemes."

Four of the teachers agreed that a greater emphasis on SPAG will be useful, with one teacher saying that there needs to be an interesting way to deliver it:

"With SpaG we will need to look at a consistent approach across the school - but there is a danger that when you turn to published schemes you go back to a reliance on it."

Several were also very positive about the new ICT curriculum, noting that it ties in very well with the latest advancements in computers, for example more pupils are using tablets, ipads etc. It also has the benefit of offering

students the opportunity to be more creative, for example, through programming and creating their own apps. Some of the resources suggested to support this new programming element in the ICT curriculum include Scratch, Alice, Kodu, Espresso, Bee-Bots and Hexbugs. One teacher said his school would still retain many of the current ICT curriculum areas, such as Multimedia, Internet and Data Handling.

There were some advantages listed in regards to the curriculum structure. One teacher said it would bring more opportunities to have cross-curricular links, allowing more flexibility across the school. Similarly, two teachers said they are looking forward to adopting the creative curriculum approach. Another teacher said the breakdown of the curriculum into years or phases is much improved, and that this could potentially lessen the pressure in Year 6.

Overall, teachers referred repeatedly to the benefits of a more creative, cross-curricular curriculum, quashing earlier speculations that this curriculum would see a return to a more traditional, subject led approach to primary teaching and learning. Teachers in this forum believed that the new curriculum in fact lends itself better to a 'Creative Curriculum'. Thirteen responses were given to this question.

CHALLENGES

Interestingly, although there has been a shift in attitude between the views of this panel, and those of previous consultations, there were nearly twice as many posts flagging up the 'challenges' compared to the advantages, so although teachers are positive, they are nonetheless still concerned about the difficulties they face.

"Staff subject knowledge will need to be strengthened to ensure all staff are able to question, differentiate and assess effectively to move the learners on. Through secure knowledge, staff will be adaptable to the changing needs they are presented with."

The key issues can be summarised as:

- Overcoming resistance to change, and the pace of change
- Training and staff knowledge
- Resourcing

A number of teachers picked up on the risks associated with launching a completely new curriculum for each subject, without support or Authorities. As one said: ***"This time it is all up to us to pick our way through and interpret as we see fit. That is a dangerous game. It would have been more sensible to change Literacy/ Numeracy one year, then change the other subjects."***

Posts about training tended to focus on concerns over staff knowledge: teachers themselves felt they needed additional training to widen their subject knowledge and to increase their confidence towards embracing a new curriculum, particularly in approaching subjects which fall outside of the specialist area. ***"It is going to be like being an NQT all over again,"*** said one.

Another challenge associated with the extra training needs will be finding the time and resources to conduct it effectively, although working collaboratively with other schools was mentioned in a number of posts.

A large number of the teachers also made reference to the challenges linked to the introduction of a new structure and work scheme. Some of these challenges include the removal of sublevels, the redevelopment of schemes of work, planning under new guidelines, as well as finding the time to gradually adapt to and implement these modifications.

The purchase of new resources to supplement the curriculum change is another substantial challenge. This could prove difficult if the school budget is limited, and it becomes necessary for resources to be shared amongst classes.

To overcome the issue of budgeting for new resources, a couple talked of working alongside other schools from the same cluster, as a means of 'bulk buying', and therefore decreasing the overall amount which would need to be purchased, although we've seen little evidence of this happening in practice.

History seemed a particular area of concern, with teachers both expressing disappointment over the loss of 'fun' topics, and the need to replace existing resources which would impact on time and budgets.

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

Planning and preparation were seen as key to tackling the challenges of rolling out the new curriculum.

There is a definite sense that whilst schools are implementing the new curriculum, it is of upmost importance that they tailor it to meet the needs of their pupils and staff, and that it complements their existing approaches.

"There are no prizes for being the first school to be using the whole curriculum. If we want learning to be meaningful, it will take time".

Respondents described various approaches to how they were tackling the changes: three teachers said that they were staggering the roll out of subjects with two having already implemented maths, others said that it largely fell to subject coordinators/heads of subject to come up with medium term plans and to deliver CPD to the rest of the staff, whilst another school had set up subject working parties in the hope that it would increase ownership and make the transition smoother.

The changes to the history curriculum seemed to be of concern to most with some speculating that they wouldn't be ready to implement this in September.

None of the schools were aware of any financial provision to support the roll out of the new curriculum.

Overall, this curriculum change is different from previous initiatives, in that teachers have a sense of ownership in forging their own curriculum which meets the needs of their children, unlike previous 'imposed' regimes. In this sense, the political messages about greater freedom and flexibility do seem to resonate amongst teachers; however they are also conscious that the price of greater freedom is greater risk, and far greater effort. ***"The cost in terms of hours cannot be underestimated,"*** as one participant said, with some feeling.

NEW RESOURCES

Of the 11 participants who responded to the question about resourcing priorities, all mentioned ICT and the new programming requirements. Only one thought they would be able to use free programming resources.

"Quite possibly the biggest expense will be for ICT - which we simply can't afford!"

It wasn't just a shortage of resources to support the ICT curriculum that was seen as problematic, but also the training that would be required for staff to confidently deliver the new objectives.

Closely following ICT was the need for resources to support the new history curriculum. There was some speculation about how quickly resources would be available to support new aspects of the curriculum and what quality they would be as companies may rush to get them on the market.

"I wonder how easy it will be to find good quality resources quickly in order to get the curriculum up and running quickly"

Two teachers mentioned needing resources to support the new aspects of the geography and science curriculum, a further three were a bit more general and just stated that they would need books to support new areas of learning.

Two schools were undergoing a stock take but could see the need for a substantial amount of books. A couple of teachers said that they would be looking for schemes of work; one felt that this would be necessary to support their NQTs.

Several also mentioned a need for new schemes of work, although it wasn't clear whether they would be turning to publishers for these.

Resources recommended by teachers

- Rising Stars Science
- Espresso
- Cornerstones

Assessment

REMOVAL OF NC LEVELS

In the absence of any clear guidance over alternative assessment systems, and with schools still needing to track and monitor progress both internally and for Ofsted purposes, it looks as if most will carry on using national curriculum levels and APP until more information is available. Even though the levels have been removed, teachers will still use them: the system may not be perfect but it's familiar. ***"Staff have enough to adapt to with the new curriculum, new assessment would put too much pressure on them."***

There was some debate amongst the panel over whether the levels would be harder, although the evidence based on the new PoS does seem to point to increased expectations over the level of challenge. Only one participant's school had started trialling a new assessment system.

Undoubtedly, however, even if schools choose to retain the NC levels and APP, all will need to be realigned with the new curriculum, requiring considerable effort in the reworking of Schemes of Work.

Two of the teachers referred to what they were doing as a cluster of schools, so it looks as if they will take a collaborative approach when tackling this issue in the future. This is in line with the latest recommendations from the NAHT.

In the very small minority of schools with a designated 'Assessment Leader', this tends to be the Head or Assistant Head.

ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME

Based on this panel's response, primary school teachers favour a pupil-centric approach to assessment, based around softer 'I can' style targets, than a data driven, standardised assessment, hence the continued support for systems such as APP. It was unclear whether this was due to a perceived lack in the market place of a sufficiently rigorous system, or because primary school teachers feel less confident about data handling and interpretation.

There were however high levels of scepticism about published systems and whether they would meet their exact requirements.

"Unless a company had a deep understanding of learning and the curriculum, it would be easy to design one that looked like it did the job, but lacked in rigour".

One teacher described sticking with what they had already as 'comforting' as with all the changes with the curriculum it was a step too far trying to change their approach to assessment as well; others agreed.

In relation to packages that offer auto-marking, teachers felt that even though marking tests was very time consuming it enabled them to understand where pupils had gone wrong and give them instant feedback. Not only were they concerned about losing an element of control, they were also uncertain about which skills the online packages were actually assessing e.g. English, maths or ICT, and as one teacher said:

"...this is where teachers then fall back on what they know as there is no way of feeling confident - or accountable - with these issues in mind."

One school had recently bought NFER (paper based) tests to use in lieu of optional SATs in Y3-5, however they lacked confidence in them as the children's reading levels came out much higher than expected, and the maths tests were too challenging. There was one positive review of an assessment resource and that was about Rising Stars science assessment; it was deemed as having 'potential'.

TRACKING PUPIL'S PROGRESS

Teachers were asked, "Given the removal of NC levels and the introduction of new value added performance measures, how will you track pupils' progress against their targets, and ensure that they are meeting or exceeding expectations?"

The answer from most was that they don't know, and plan to wait and see what others are doing. Interestingly, it's not just 'normal schools' that are paralysed by this: conversations with leaders of Teaching Schools say that they're not sure whether they should be taking the initiative on assessment and progress tracking. Currently, they're waiting for guidance on this, hoping that a 'checklist' will appear.

As noted above, amongst those looking at tracking progress, all favour a softer, pupil-centred approach based around 'I can' statements to identify children working below, at, and above appropriate expectations. These expectations tend to be based on year appropriate levels, rather than personalised targets for each particular child.

Certainly, if Michael Gove's recommendations to introduce a formal baseline test for 4-5 year olds go ahead, then this will require primary schools to be data driven, and monitor the progress of each child not just against age appropriate levels, but against their own predictions.

PUPIL PREMIUM

Other than one respondent, it was clear from teachers' responses that schools are aware of the need to track the performance of their pupil premium pupils, although none mentioned introducing new systems or strategies in order to do so. None mentioned any link between investment in initiatives, and the performance of these students, which suggests that for these schools, Pupil Premium funding is rolled in with general budgets. One said the funding was used for all vulnerable pupils as well as those eligible for funding, and that they were a 'big focus' for the school, although she didn't mention any specific interventions or initiatives.

The teachers mentioned a couple of pupil tracking systems which their schools use in order to monitor the performance and progress of their Pupil Premium children. Four teachers said that they currently use SIMS Assessment Manager, whilst another said that her school uses O'Track, which she commended for the assessment data which has a large number of filters for tracking a wide range of categories. Another teacher responded that her school uses Pupil Asset.

Some of the teachers described their school's own tracking tools which have been implemented within the classroom. One teacher referred to their 'orange' target children, presumably based on a traffic light system of coding, although this wasn't made explicit in her response. A second teacher explained their class tracker system, in which they identify the pupil premium children at the front of their books with a 'secret code', which ensures the pupils don't feel distinguished amongst the rest of the class. Three teachers said that they hold regular pupil progress meetings, in which they track the development of their Pupil Premium children.

With regards to Pupil Premium and approaching the New Curriculum from September, two teachers responded that they were unsure as to which method would be carried forward. One teacher said that whilst they currently use SIMS within her school, it remained to be seen whether this tool would still be adequate under the new curriculum.

Addition of a language

CURRENT LANGUAGE OFFERINGS

Ten of the twelve teachers said that their school currently offers French as a second language, because this provides consistency in line with what the students will learn from Year 7 in their feeder Secondary schools. Two of the teachers taught German and Spanish at their corresponding Primary schools. A number of teachers said that they offered additional after school clubs to widen their second language provision – these languages were French, Spanish, Mandarin and Japanese.

When considering the move to a compulsory language, one Deputy Headteacher said that they were looking to consult with both their staff and pupils as to whether to introduce an alternative language, besides French, from September. Another Deputy Headteacher said that as well as offering French to KS2 pupils, both KS1 and KS2 children have a weekly "language of the month" session, in which they are introduced to the different languages spoken in school. The majority of teachers said that on the arrival of the new curriculum in September, they would continue to offer the same language.

Two teachers said they had developed links with their feeder Secondary schools; although this wasn't clarified in the forum, other consultations with teachers indicate that these tend to be brokered by the secondary school.

COMPULSORY LANGUAGE AT KS2

Teachers agreed in principle with the introduction of a compulsory language in KS2; in practice several were extremely apprehensive at the prospect of teaching it themselves with a limited skillset.

"I am terrified about teaching it. However, I believe MFL to be an essential part of learning at the primary level. ... but that doesn't make us any better equipped to deliver it!"

There were a number of advantages which the teachers attributed to learning a language at KS2, including children's natural aptitude for acquiring a second language; an opportunity to explore other cultures; an enjoyable subject for the children to learn; and it equips them for learning languages later on in their education.

The teachers said the biggest challenge they anticipated was with regards to staff having both the confidence and the knowledge to teach the subject effectively. One teacher said that the idea of teaching French to her class was "scary", as it was not her specialist area, and there was additional pressure to meet the curriculum criteria:

"Having it as a compulsory subject is very daunting as it has to be done "right" then to definite levels and with evidence and assessment etc."

Two teachers agreed that CPD training linked to language teaching would be an essential requirement to increase the confidence of teachers in approaching the language curriculum. Pronunciation was mentioned by two participants, as an area they would like the most development in.

Four teachers responded that their schools already taught a second language, implying it was already quite well embedded within the school.

DELIVERING LANGUAGE TEACHING

Eight of the twelve respondents in this thread said that the classroom teachers at their schools would be responsible for delivering the teaching of languages. One Deputy Headteacher voiced her concern over this, saying that she does not feel confident with her existing knowledge of French. Another teacher commented that at her school, the teachers had been provided with the appropriate training to assist with their MFL subject knowledge.

Four of the teachers responded that their schools have already acquired specialist language teachers, who tend to teach on a one day per week basis. Two of the teachers said that they felt the use of a specialist language teacher would be the best approach to the provision of MFL.

Three of the teachers said that their schools would adopt a multi-pronged approach to the delivery, through a combination of a specialist teacher one day a week, with the classroom teacher supplementing the pupils' learning further through daily input sessions and the use of multimedia resources. One teacher felt that a specialist teacher would be required especially from Year 4 onwards, as the pupils advance.

NEW RESOURCES

Five of the eleven respondents to this thread said that they would be looking for new resources to support French lessons at their school, while two said that they would continue to use their current language schemes.

Six of the teachers said that they currently have a specialist language teacher in their school, most of whom develop their own resources to use within the classroom. A few mentioned using free online resources, such as those on the BBC site.

Amongst those looking for new resources, desirable features included programmes that were easy to follow, offered clear progression across the school, were games based and interactive making the lessons fun and enjoyable for children. One felt that there was a shortage of suitable resources on the market.

Two teachers mentioned the foreign language resources that they are currently using: Rising Stars and Rigolo.

Clearly, schools lacking specialist teachers are in a bit of a resourcing loop: without the relevant skills, staff struggle to evaluate the quality and suitability of language programmes, although these are precisely the schools most in need of a structured, supportive programme with child-friendly resources.

CPD

TRAINING

Teachers had mixed views on whether the amount of training had changed, but there was an overall sense that the quality and effectiveness of training (whether more or less) was better. Participants felt that it was better tailored to the needs of their staff, and was more systematic. Many mentioned sharing in-house expertise, using lesson observations and peer coaching, and monitoring pupil progress as a way of judging the impact of training.

"It makes more sense as there is more tailoring to the needs of the staff and less blanket training. Not like the old days people were out at hotels eating big lunches - or was that just me?"

Half the respondents agreed that on the whole, the volume / spend on training had decreased over the past five years. The reasons for this decline included budget restrictions; a change in training needs; staff shortages and struggling to find the time to complete it. Conversely, four reported that there had been a significant increase in training at their schools in recent times, particularly in relation to maximising CPD days and collaborating with their cluster. One teacher said that there has been upsurge recently, with an effort to encourage more staff to attend courses. Another teacher spoke very favourably of the in-house training she receives at her school:

"Our training has increased hugely in the last 5 years as we have had a new head teacher who is driving the school forward at a pace. The training is relevant to our needs and aspirations."

She listed some of the training developments that have been instigated; including weekly CPD based staff meetings, weekly ICT clinics and a series of training courses for their Teaching Assistants.

Two key messages emerged from this thread: the old days of training being administered to the school, whether they needed it or not, have gone. There is far more emphasis on sharing good practice within the school, and the cluster, and schools buying in expertise only when needed (possibly in collaboration with other schools in their area). A couple felt that compared with the previous curriculum changes, they were being given very little support, but overall the mood about training seemed positive.

"Training may have reduced in frequency but the use of cluster training events has increased the overall impact"

TRAINING UNDER THE NEW CURRICULUM

When specifically asked about the extent to which the new curriculum had prompted a need for training, teachers flagged up a number of real concerns:

Firstly, they feel very anxious about the implementation of this curriculum. Although they welcome the greater freedom, the amount of change that they are dealing with, and the lack of support in training or resources, leaves them feeling very exposed to getting it wrong.

"Schools are meant to interpret the curriculum in a way that suits their environment. The trouble is we need a model given to us first to base our own on!"

This is a big cultural shift for schools: previously, new policies were introduced with a massive support network, creating a culture of dependency amongst many. Stripping this away completely has left many feeling isolated, worried and fearful of change. Lack of staff confidence could result in teachers tweaking their existing plans, rather than completely rethinking them. This is potentially a lost opportunity.

With limited budgets, teachers face the dilemma of investing in resources, or in training. One teacher noted that in subjects which staff were less familiar with, resources would need to support both them and the children, rather than just the children.

"Much of the training at the moment has been about acclimatising us to the NC, not helping us to think about how we are going to deliver it. It would be useful for CPD to offer exciting, active, relevant ways to tackle new areas."

Training needs around the new curriculum are:

- How to assess under the new curriculum (flagged up by six of the 12 posters)
- How to 'fit everything in', i.e. coverage and delivery of the new PoS
- Strategies for teaching the new PoS, e.g. teaching spelling through investigations, rather than relying on worksheets.

Unless more training is put in place, staff will not have the confidence to embrace the change: there's too much of it, and it simply feels too risky to throw away all their old plans and start again.

"Training will be needed to help teachers feeling confident and comfortable in delivering the new curriculum or teachers will simply stick to what they know."

DELIVERY OF TRAINING

The most common strategy is for subject leaders to attend training, and then cascade the information back to staff. Three participants also mentioned cluster training; a model that is effective and allows the cost to be shared.

External trainers comprise a mix of independent consultants (like Chris Quigley and Karen Mills), along with CPD providers such as Osiris, and training provided by software companies (Espresso was mentioned twice, and commended for the quality of the training).

The majority of teachers said they would look for this training to be delivered through an in-house method, whether this were to be at their own school, or at a school within their cluster. One teacher highlighted the benefit of conducting in-house training in the build up to the new NC:

"Once the new curriculum is up and running we will be able to moderate and monitor progress regularly to see any gaps in teacher knowledge or curriculum areas which are causing problems."

Only one teacher said he would contact his LA consultancy team for support, although it wasn't clear whether this was for advice on training providers, or to set up training directly with the LA.

Appendix: summary of reforms to assessment and accountability for primary schools - March 2014

This is a summary of the government's response to the consultation on primary assessment and accountability. For full document, please see [here](#).

There will be two components to the accountability measures:

- **Progress:** For schools opting to use the teacher assessment in reception, this will be measured from reception to KS2. Otherwise (and in any case until 2022) this will be measured from KS1 to KS2. Pupils will have to make "sufficient progress" in **all of** reading, writing and maths.
- **Attainment:** 85% pupils will be expected to reach the new equivalents of NC level 4b (currently 65% are expected to do so). **All of** reading, writing and maths will contribute.

Floor standard:

A school will fall **below** the floor only if pupils make poor progress **and** fewer than 85% of them achieve the new expected standard. A school will be considered **above** the floor if it meets either the progress or attainment floor standards.

So, if a school has a particularly high performing intake and its progress is therefore low, it could still be above the floor standard on the basis of the attainment standard. If a school has a low performing intake and its attainment is therefore low, it could still be above the floor standard on the basis of the performance standard.

First assessments will be made in 2016

New performance descriptors are due autumn 2014

Early Years:

Teacher assessment

Two-year old progress check remains.

No EYFS profile.

Reception:

Teacher assessment	Exam	Reporting	Note
Optional; based on approved list of assessment tools. If used, constitutes progress measure baseline.		Reporting to be contextualised with school's own assessments.	Reception baseline not used in progress measures until 2022

Key Stage 1:

Teacher assessment	Exam	Reporting	Note
Speaking and listening (based on a number of new performance descriptors, due autumn 2014).	Externally set, internally marked:	Scaled, where 100 will represent the <i>new expected standard</i> for KS1 - pupils will be at, above or below this.	Ofsted to moderate teacher assessments and internally marked exams KS1 results to be used as baseline if reception assessments aren't used - and anyway until 2022.
Science (based on just one performance descriptor, due autumn 2014).	Maths	Results expressed by the performance descriptor each pupil most closely meets.	
Phonics check to remain.	Reading Writing (spelling, punctuation and grammar).	No school reporting.	

Key Stage 2:

Teacher assessment	Exam	Reporting	Note
Writing based on a number of new performance descriptors.	Externally set, externally marked:	Scaled , where 100 will represent the <i>new expected standard</i> for KS2 - pupils will be at, above or below this.	P-scales are to be retained and may be moderated. There will be a new provision for pupils above P-scales but below new descriptors.
Reading, maths and science based on just one performance descriptor.	Maths Reading Spelling, punctuation and grammar	Pupil scores shown against school, local, and national averages. School performance to show: average progress in reading, writing and maths % of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics average score of pupils % of pupils who achieve a high score in all areas.	Science sampling retained. DfE has an ambition to show "each school's position in the country on these measures".

Note: the suggested decile ranking has been dropped.



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