



**Office for Standards
in Education**

The curriculum in successful primary schools

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Introduction

1. Primary education in England has been dominated in recent years by the government's drive to raise standards in English and mathematics through the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLNS), implemented in the majority of primary schools in 1998 and 1999 respectively. With very few exceptions, primary schools have focused much of their time and attention on adapting their teaching and the curriculum to accommodate the methods and content of the NLNS. They have made these adaptations successfully, by and large, but headteachers have expressed concern about the problems of overload in the curriculum. They perceive this overload to be the result of the strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, including the various intervention programmes, and the imperative to improve pupils' performance in the national tests for English and mathematics measured against increasingly higher annual targets.

2. There are two interrelated questions in the current debate about the primary curriculum. The first is 'Can it be done?', which focuses on the difficulties of fitting everything that is required into the time that is available for teaching. The second question is 'Does the national curriculum need to be slimmed down?' In other words, do adjustments need to be made to the national curriculum to make breadth and balance more attainable within and across subjects and in relation to skills, attitudes and values as well as knowledge and understanding? This report provides answers to both these questions.

3. The two questions are not new. The effects on pupils' learning of their experiencing a curriculum with a strong emphasis on the basic skills has been part of the national debate in this country for a long time. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) made an important contribution to that debate in a report published in 1978:

...there is no evidence in the survey to suggest that a narrower curriculum enabled children to do better in the basic skills or led to the work being more aptly chosen to suit the capacities of the children.¹

4. The 1978 report, which was based on a detailed survey of teaching and standards in a stratified sample of 540 primary schools, endorsed clearly the benefits of a broad, balanced curriculum:

The general educational progress of children and their competence in the basic skills appear to have benefited where they were involved in a programme of work that included art and craft, history and geography, music and physical education, and science, as well as language, mathematics and religious and moral education...

5. The nature and scope of the curriculum were the central theme in another report by HMI published in 1985, *The Curriculum from 5 to 16*.² This report argued

¹ *Primary Education in England: A survey by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools*, HMSO 1978.

² *The Curriculum from 5 to 16: Curriculum Matters 2*, HMSO 1985.

that all pupils should have access to a curriculum of similar breadth and balance, irrespective of the school they attended or their social circumstances:

The curriculum should aim to be broad by bringing all pupils into contact with an agreed range of areas of learning and experience. It should be balanced in that it allows the adequate development of each area. In addition, each major component should have breadth, balance and relevance and should incorporate a progression in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding.

6. It was not long before a curriculum of the kind envisaged by HMI became a reality for all schools. The Education Reform Act 1988, which included the introduction of the national curriculum, enshrined breadth in the curriculum and led to a far greater consistency of coverage. By the mid-1990s, however, there were increasing concerns that the breadth and intensity of the demands of the national curriculum were restricting the ability of teachers to ensure basic literacy and numeracy. A report by Ofsted in 1996 on the teaching of reading in London primary schools, for example, identified poor teaching and low standards in this crucial aspect of literacy.³ It was evidence of this kind, combined with international comparisons showing the long tail of low achievement in this country, which led to the establishment of the NLNS.

7. Ofsted has published annual reports on the impact of the two strategies since they were introduced. Drawing on the evidence of inspection and data from the national tests, the reports have described the substantial improvements that the strategies have brought about, not only in the quality of teaching and standards achieved in English and mathematics, but also in the teaching of the rest of the curriculum. By promoting higher standards in literacy and numeracy, the strategies have improved pupils' access to other subjects and, in so doing, have helped to create a more inclusive curriculum. These gains are hard-won but, in consequence, the teaching methods and content of the strategies are becoming embedded in the work of the majority of primary schools.

8. More recently, however, Ofsted's evaluation of the NLNS has shown that the breadth of the curriculum, particularly within subjects, has often been affected adversely by a combination of the two strategies, including 'catch-up' programmes, and the requirement on schools to meet increasingly demanding performance targets as measured by the national tests. The latest reports on the NLNS refer to schools which, although offering a curriculum which contains all the required subjects and aspects, were not providing sufficient depth in their teaching of the non-core foundation subjects.⁴ Further evidence of the shortcomings in meeting the full programmes of study in subjects was provided by data from section 10 inspections, which showed that, in 2000 and 2001, problems of coverage were particularly marked in design and technology, art, music, geography and religious education. The Ofsted reports on the NLNS concluded that, although the improved standards of English and mathematics have been vital and well worth

³ *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London primary schools*, Ofsted 1996.

⁴ *The National Literacy Strategy: the third year* and *The National Numeracy Strategy: the second year*, Ofsted 2001.

winning, there may be difficulties ahead for the curriculum as a whole unless it is carefully managed:

The priority schools have given, rightly, to English and mathematics in the primary curriculum, has resulted in improvements in standards that outweigh any of the adverse effects on other subjects, at least in the medium term. In the longer term, however, these gains will need to be considered in the context of their continuing impact on the primary curriculum as a whole.

9. The University of Toronto, which was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to provide an external evaluation of the NLNS, in the second of its three annual reports also referred to schools' views of the influence of the two strategies on the curriculum.⁵ The report described what the schools regarded as adverse effects on other subjects as 'collateral damage':

DfES has done a great deal to facilitate the alignment of NLS and NNS with other subjects. Nevertheless, throughout the year 2000 we heard concerns from many headteachers about the strategies squeezing out other crucial programmes and experience.

10. In response to these concerns, Ofsted conducted two structured telephone surveys with a representative sample of 50 primary headteachers. The first survey, in March 2001, uncovered a gloomy picture in many of the schools. The headteachers reported that the practical, investigative aspects of the non-core foundation subjects were being neglected because of pressure from a combination of the NLNS, including catch-up provision, the drive to meet higher targets for standards in English and mathematics, and what was perceived as the substantial content requirements of the national curriculum. Most of the pressure was reported as coming from the additional time needed to cover the national curriculum requirements for English in addition to the literacy hour. The subjects that were said to be the most adversely affected were design and technology, art and design, history and geography.

11. The second survey in March 2002, with the same headteachers, showed little change in the time given to history, geography and design and technology, but an improvement in the time given to art and design, music and physical education. There were signs of action, in around a third of the schools, to redress the balance of the curriculum within the non-core foundation subjects. The more significant changes that were described were:

- | a more flexible approach to the timetabling of subjects over the day, with more examples of a third subject being taught in the morning, as well as English and mathematics
- | teachers becoming more knowledgeable about the NLNS, more confident about adapting their teaching, and better at finding ways to teach aspects of literacy and mathematics at other times and through other subjects

⁵ *Watching and Learning 2: OISE/UT Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies 2001.*

- | more encouragement of staff to make links between subjects, even though the subjects were still being planned separately
- | more extensive use of curriculum plans that were already available, particularly the schemes of work published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- | more confidence in schools about blocking time at particular points each term to allow more sustained work to take place in the practical subjects, particularly art and design and technology.

12. The annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI), published in 2002, also referred to the pressures on the primary curriculum and their impact on breadth and balance. The report refers, in particular, to the curriculum time that is taken up by the drive to raise standards in English and mathematics and by the national tests and the preparations for them. It points out that 'It is the aspects of subjects that bring them to life – enquiry, problem-solving and practical work – that have suffered most. This represents a serious narrowing of the curriculum'. In spite of this warning, the report sounded an optimistic note; it drew attention to schools which, although in a minority, were:

... still able to provide a curriculum which, while paying due regard to achieving high standards in English and mathematics, is broad, exciting and challenges pupils across the full range of national expectations. This is invariably due to a well-considered curriculum model which makes the best use of all available time and which is based on clear guidance to teachers of what they are to teach, when and with what intended outcomes. Often, in such schools, high standards are achieved across the full curriculum.

The success of these effective schools, identified through section 10 inspections, led Ofsted to undertake a more detailed analysis which is the subject of this report.

13. The analysis is based on the work of a sample of 31 successful primary schools in 26 local education authorities (LEAs). These schools were drawn from the 3,508 primary schools that were inspected in the academic year 2000/01. Two criteria were used to select them: the quality and range of learning opportunities were very good or excellent; and standards of attainment in English and mathematics in 2001, measured by the national curriculum tests, were in the top 25% compared to similar schools in England. In 2000/01, there were 117 schools that met these criteria at Key Stage 2 and 89 that met them at Key Stage 1. The 31 schools whose work is the subject of this report, are representative of this larger group of successful schools.

14. As part of the survey, HMI:

- | held discussions with headteachers
- | observed lessons in the non-core foundation subjects
- | held discussions with subject co-ordinators

- | read school documentation, including curriculum planning
- | examined samples of pupils' work in the non-core foundation subjects
- | held discussions with Year 6 pupils.

The combination of the evidence from section 10 inspections, the visits to the schools and the analysis of the curriculum by HMI, and the data on pupils' performance in the national curriculum tests, adds to the validity and robustness of the findings of this report.

Main findings

- The schools in this survey achieve what many others claim is not possible. They have high standards in English, mathematics and science, while also giving a strong emphasis to the humanities, physical education and the arts.
- The richness of the curriculum in these schools, and, in particular, their achievements in the arts, contributed strongly to the development of pupils' imagination and the creative use of media and materials. The growth of pupils' self-confidence which these achievements inspired, helped them to tackle more challenging work and develop a positive attitude towards school.
- The headteachers were single-minded in their approach to school improvement and had a clear vision of what they wanted their schools to achieve. They saw the curriculum as the means for ensuring the vision, involved themselves actively in managing it and, at the same time, created a strong sense of teamwork by involving the staff in discussion and decision-making.
- These schools had embraced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies positively, with strong personal involvement by the headteacher. They recognised that these initiatives would be the key to achieving the highest standards in English and mathematics and that they could also have a positive impact on teaching and standards in other subjects.
- The teachers planned and taught the curriculum largely through separate subject coverage at both key stages. They were adept, however, at making good use of links across subjects which:
 - | strengthened the relevance and coherence of the curriculum for pupils
 - | ensured that pupils applied the knowledge and skills learned in one subject to others, thus reinforcing their learning and increasing their understanding and confidence
 - | made good use of longer blocks of time, enabling pupils to undertake sustained work on themes covering two or three subjects.
- The headteachers were successful in their determination to make the planning of the curriculum as efficient as possible and release more of their teachers' time to concentrate on improving the quality of their teaching. They achieved this by:
 - | capitalising on what was already available by way of published material
 - | ensuring that, where teachers had invested time and energy in writing detailed, long- and medium-term plans, these would be used again with a minimum of change and all relevant staff would follow them
 - | making good use of computers to make necessary amendments with minimal effort.

- The headteachers had clear and high expectations, not only of what should be taught, but how. They set these out in a detailed teaching and learning policy that was followed by all staff so that the school's principles were translated into practice. The result was:
 - | consistent approaches to teaching in all classes
 - | good progression in pupils' learning
 - | pupils who knew what was expected of them and how they would be treated by all adults in the school.
- Many of the schools had found ways to increase taught time above the minimum national recommendation. This was achieved by re-assessing the value of time spent on the various parts of the school day, including breaks and lunchtimes, and making savings which added up to worthwhile amounts of curriculum time.
- The curriculum was enriched by first-hand experiences, including visits locally and further afield, contributions from adults with knowledge and skills that could enhance pupils' learning, and an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.
- The majority of the headteachers had been a long time in their current posts or had been headteachers elsewhere. This experience, combined with the clarity of their vision, gave them the confidence to pursue their goals with determination and, if necessary, to take risks. They were single-minded about appointing the right people. Their leadership inspired loyalty from staff and the community and gave teachers confidence in what they were doing.

What were the schools like?

15. All the 31 schools had had a section 10 inspection in the year before the survey. They were selected from a list of those whose section 10 inspection reports showed them to be achieving standards which were well above average in English and mathematics compared to similar schools. The quality of the curriculum, leadership, management and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development had all been judged to be good or better in their inspections. Over half of the schools had gained Beacon status by the time HMI visited them.

16. The schools ranged in size from 53 to 628 on roll and were in a wide variety of socio-economic circumstances. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals varied between 5% and 68%. The number of pupils with English as an additional language ranged from none in two of the schools to one school where all of the pupils spoke English as their second language.

17. The following three descriptions exemplify the variety of schools which were included in the survey.

School A is in inner-London. There are 315 pupils on roll, 60% of whom are eligible for free school meals. There are high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and a high proportion of the pupils have special educational needs (SEN). Some 40% have English as an additional language. The school is a Beacon school for leadership and management, the curriculum and SEN. The school had always had a strong arts curriculum, but very low standards in the core subjects. The new headteacher was determined that the strong arts curriculum would be maintained, but that, at the same time, academic standards would have to improve. The revisions made to the curriculum, the improvements in the quality of teaching, and the use made of the NLNS have transformed standards in the core subjects in the space of four years. For example, in 1996, only 20% of pupils attained Level 4 in mathematics, but this figure had risen to 86% by 2001.

School B is a small rural school in the South West, with five mixed-age classes. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The headteacher plays an active part in the development of the curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on physical education, particularly swimming, and music; standards in both subjects are high. Swimming is taught by the headteacher and a teaching assistant, using the school's learner pool and a larger one nearby. The school has been in the final of the English Schools National Swimming Championships for the past few years.

School C is a one-form entry primary school in a small town in the East Riding of Yorkshire. All the pupils are white and the percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals is well below the national average. It is a Beacon school for leadership and management, the curriculum and the arts. It has developed a curriculum with strong links between subjects, within which every subject has its own scheme of work for each year group. Although the school uses the National Literacy Strategy Framework for planning work in English, the teaching objectives are taught at different times over the day, mostly linked to other subjects, rather than through a conventional literacy hour. Detailed, fortnightly plans include word, sentence and text-level work and all of the teaching strategies recommended by the NLS, such as shared and guided reading, are incorporated.

18. In all the schools in the survey, the lasting impressions were of:
- | pride in the pupils' achievements and a wish to celebrate them, demonstrated through displays of artwork, writing and photographs of pupils engaged in sport, dance, music and drama
 - | the clear sense of purpose and direction in the school's work
 - | a strong sense of teamwork among the staff, based on mutual support and collaboration
 - | the high quality of the environment in every part of the school, including the grounds.

As one headteacher said: 'The staff aim to provide an atmosphere and environment which will stimulate an enthusiasm for work, and where progress and success are of the utmost value'.

What did the headteachers do to achieve success?

19. The headteachers of these schools were single-minded in their approach to school improvement and had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve for their pupils. In every case, they regarded the curriculum as the means of ensuring this vision. They involved themselves actively in its management and development and made the most of what was available to them – people, time, resources and accommodation – to achieve their goals.

20. In all cases, the headteachers made the appointment of high-quality staff a priority. They were committed to finding the right people and were not willing to accept second-best. One headteacher of an inner-city school admitted to being 'obsessed' with recruiting and appointing the best people, including teaching assistants and supply teachers. She invested time in networking and headhunting because of the benefits she knew the school would derive. In several schools, headteachers were able to attract teachers without even advertising: because they had gained very good reputations, teachers telephoned to ask about vacancies.

21. The involvement of all staff in discussions and decision-making created a strong sense of teamwork. As a result, staff were more committed to implementing decisions and this gave a firm basis for consistency. New teachers and other staff accustomed themselves quickly to clear, agreed routines. This sense of teamwork also helped to sustain the schools through periods of change. The headteachers were also quick to see the potential in all members of staff, both teachers and teaching assistants, to provide knowledge and expertise in areas where it was lacking. They were not afraid, for example, to give teaching assistants responsibility related to teaching subjects or aspects of subjects where they had the necessary abilities.

22. The headteachers had either been in their current schools for a long time or had been headteachers elsewhere. This experience, combined with their clear vision, gave them the confidence to pursue their goals with conviction and without being deflected. They were quick to recognise the potential for change and improvement that was offered by national initiatives, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. They believed, for example, that the strategies held the key to high standards for their pupils in English and mathematics. They ensured that teachers adopted the strategies constructively by involving themselves actively in their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. They ensured that the level of their own professional knowledge remained up to date so that they could talk with authority to all their staff about the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

23. In particular, the headteachers did not try to do everything at once and allowed time for developments to be integrated effectively into the school's work. In several of the smaller schools, the headteachers did not nominate subject co-ordinators. Instead, all the teachers worked together on aspects of the curriculum which they had agreed were particular priorities, while developments in other subjects were given less emphasis. In larger schools, when a subject was identified as a priority, the headteachers gave the subject co-ordinator time, resources and support to lead developments. Where the co-ordinators did not have a specialist background in the subject for which they were responsible, the headteachers enabled them to develop their expertise.

An excellent ICT co-ordinator, with little formal training, had not only become an expert but had also extended his influence by training Year 6 pupils as young ICT technicians. This enhanced significantly the potential of the school's ICT resources. They helped other pupils and assisted the staff with the running of the school's network.

24. The headteachers took the leading role in monitoring and evaluation, knowing them to be critical to the success of their schools. The monitoring focused on:

- | coverage of the planned curriculum through the scrutiny of medium-term and short-term planning
- | the quality of teaching, and therefore the performance of individual teachers, through classroom observation
- | standards of achievement through the analysis of test results in the core subjects and teacher assessment in other subjects, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work
- | consistency and continuity in curricular provision, through reviewing the work across all classes in a year group (in large schools) or checking continuity and progression in a subject from one year group to the next
- | the progress being made by all pupils, with a good awareness of differences in the performance of boys and girls and pupils from minority groups, and any consequent planned action such as curricular targets.

Not only did monitoring show the schools the extent to which they were meeting their own aims, but it also enabled the headteachers to use the evidence in managing the performance of their staff. This helped ensure an appropriate element of accountability to set alongside the goal of encouraging creativity and flexibility. It also helped headteachers to give praise where it was due and recognise each person's contribution.

25. The headteachers used the results of monitoring to evaluate the work of their schools and this, in turn, informed the school development plan. The headteachers were skilled at monitoring, both to reward and value success and to improve any weaker practice. Where the monitoring revealed a weakness, the headteachers acted immediately to improve matters. For instance, in the case of a weak teacher, targets and a time-scale were set for improvement, linked to support from within the school and through external training. The process was followed up and the headteacher was not afraid to invoke formal competency procedures. As with other aspects of their work, the headteachers were clear about what they wanted, made this plain to others and took action when their high expectations were not met. An important outcome of monitoring and evaluation was the implementation of subtle changes to the curriculum, so there was always the potential for development and improvement.

26. In addition to the knowledge they obtained through formal monitoring, the headteachers also knew what was going on through their active involvement in managing the curriculum. For example, they:

- | led staff meetings which focused on curriculum planning
- | led school-based in-service training
- | taught booster classes in Year 6 or a set in English or mathematics
- | acted as a subject co-ordinator
- | taught the classes of subject co-ordinators to give them non-contact time to develop their own subjects, while at the same time giving headteachers the opportunity to observe the impact of the curriculum at first hand
- | worked with subject co-ordinators, especially for English and mathematics, to analyse national test data and pupils' test papers
- | worked with staff to give them the confidence to adhere to the guidance and policies that they had all contributed to and believed in.

27. These headteachers were good at communicating their high expectations clearly to all staff. For example, detailed teaching and learning policies set out not only what should be taught but also the teaching techniques that were to be used in particular contexts and aspects of the curriculum. All staff were expected to follow these policies. The result was that there were consistent approaches to teaching in all classes and pupils progressed well in their learning. This consistency went further than this, however, pervading the whole of school life. Pupils knew what was expected of them and how all adults in the school would treat them, whether they encountered them in the classroom, the corridor or the playground.

28. The headteachers also had the courage of their convictions to ensure that policies were put into practice as intended, particularly when teachers were hesitant or uncertain about their impact. In one school, for example, the teachers were reluctant to continue to use, during the section 10 inspection, the NNS Year 6 mathematics lesson plans they had been using all term. They felt that the inspectors would want to see plans that they had devised themselves and that it would be too risky to use published materials. The headteacher convinced them that the readily available lesson plans provided the clear teaching and learning intentions needed for a good lesson and that they should, therefore, be used just as they stood. He was proved right and the school received a very positive report. Another headteacher encouraged teachers, as part of their planning, to annotate the schemes of work published by the QCA and adapt them to meet the needs of their own class; she did not expect teachers to write things twice, which was a waste of their time. The most widespread feature, however, was the way in which the headteachers insisted that what was taught was taught well and with sufficient time to allow pupils to work in depth. This allowed time for practical work and enquiry-based learning involving first-hand experience in the school locality or further afield. The teachers, with the support of the headteacher, wrote their medium-term plans with this in mind, identifying at the start of a term or a half-term's work which aspects were crucial to pupils' progress, and would therefore be covered in depth, and which would be given less attention at this time.

29. The headteachers were good at harnessing the contributions of other people

and organisations beyond the school. Several headteachers, both in the Beacon and other schools, provided in-service training on behalf of their LEAs. They shared their many strengths with other schools, both locally and nationally, but they were open-minded enough to learn from others as well. As a result, their own schools benefited further.

30. Most of the headteachers were proud of their schools and took every opportunity to promote them through well-staged events and attractive publications showing the breadth of the curriculum and the high standards achieved by the pupils. In one school, for example, the information for new parents included letters of welcome from Year 6 pupils in their own excellent handwriting, clearly and cogently describing the virtues of the school.

What was the curriculum like?

Principles upon which the curriculum was planned

31. In all the schools, staff shared strongly held beliefs about the curriculum and the way in which children learn. These beliefs were expressed clearly through, for example, mission statements and school brochures. The beliefs and principles became the basis for constructing the curriculum.

32. All the schools believed that:

- | each pupil was entitled to receive the best education possible and achieve the highest standards
- | the curriculum should meet pupils' individual needs
- | pupils learn best from a broad and challenging curriculum
- | the curriculum should involve first-hand experience and be taught in ways which make sense for pupils
- | achievement in a range of subjects across the curriculum, including science, humanities and the arts, improves pupils' confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to tackle more challenging work and develop a positive attitude towards school
- | improving pupils' confidence and self-esteem has a positive effect upon their attainment in the core subjects.

33. The curriculum in these schools had evolved through experience and evaluation. The headteachers had brought the curriculum in each case to a mature stage of development: their approaches were evolutionary not revolutionary. They had a strong commitment to reflect the aims and values of their school in the content and character of the curriculum.

34. In almost all of these schools, the curriculum was planned and organised in separate subjects. The teachers were adept at making best use of links between subjects. They recognised that where links are effective they enable pupils to apply the knowledge and skills learnt in one subject to others, as well as bringing coherence to learning when complementary aspects of subjects are brought together. Where subjects were grouped under the heading of a theme, such as 'Where we live' or 'Food and healthy living', the number of subjects was rarely no more than three or four and the links between them were strong. The schools, usually through their subject co-ordinators, ensured that good progression within subjects was secure in the long-term planning for each key stage. This thematic work bore no resemblance to the broad-ranging topics that were common to primary schools in the past. The rigour with which each subject was planned in the sample schools, underpinned by the objectives from the NLNS frameworks for teaching and, in most cases, the QCA schemes of work, was providing pupils with the broad curriculum to which they were entitled.

35. Examples of useful links between literacy and numeracy and other subjects included:

- | persuasive speaking or writing in history
- | note-taking in geography
- | religious education or history texts used for exploration and analysis in the literacy hour
- | application of mathematics skills in science or design and technology.

36. All the schools placed a strong emphasis on the humanities, physical education and, especially the arts, as these motivated pupils and contributed to their enthusiasm for school and education generally. To promote these subjects further, these schools enriched their curriculum through a wide variety of carefully planned activities, including day and residential visits and the use of subject experts from within the school or from outside. This enrichment provision:

- | stimulated positive attitudes towards learning and the school as a whole
- | enhanced pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence
- | broadened their experiences
- | encouraged pupils to value learning for its own sake.

37. The enrichment of the curriculum contributed effectively to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

One Beacon school had introduced a 'Fitness for Learning' project. The programme was initiated because the school had concerns about balancing their curriculum and felt that physical education was being marginalised. The project was based on the hypothesis that 'daily physical exercise makes children fitter, motivated and better learners, setting a pattern for life'.

The project involved physical exercise for all pupils, through the physical education programme on two days a week and fifteen minutes of exercises in the classroom on the remaining three days. The school also used short periods of 'Fit for Learning' activities during a number of subject-focused days that included design and technology, mathematics, English and environmental work. Physical activity and one of these subjects provided a full day's focused learning programme for the whole school, with titles such as 'Fit for Literacy'.

38. All the schools arranged a wide variety of visits. Residential visits in the United Kingdom and abroad gave pupils a chance to experience outdoor and adventurous activity and to study an environment or culture in contrast to their own. Day and residential visits and use of subject experts were built into curriculum planning.

In one school, the history co-ordinator devised and managed the programme of visits and visitors to ensure they matched the units of work planned for history in each year group. Later, she led a staff meeting to evaluate the impact of the programme, replacing the weakest elements.

This rigorous approach ensured that the planned activities contributed as effectively as possible to pupils' knowledge and skills and had a positive impact on standards.

Implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies

39. The implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies had challenged these schools in the same way as all other schools. What characterised these schools in particular, however, was the positive frame of mind in which they embraced the strategies and their associated intervention programmes. Crucially, they did not see them as an imposition or a threat, but as frameworks for planning and tools for ensuring high standards in English and mathematics.

40. From the beginning, almost all of the schools in this survey taught a literacy hour and a daily mathematics lesson, while maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum, attuned to the needs of their pupils. They taught the national curriculum and, by using their judgement about which aspects were crucial to the progress of their pupils in particular subjects, were selective about which aspects of the programmes of study to teach in depth. The breadth of the curriculum was not compromised and the schools took responsibility for ensuring good balance within each subject.

41. The schools mainly approached the strategies through one of three simple approaches to the timetable, all of which featured the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson as separate lessons:

- | **Model 1** am: literacy and numeracy; pm: foundation subjects
- | **Model 2** am: literacy and numeracy with a foundation subject to provide variety and make better use of the longer morning session; pm: the remaining foundation subjects
- | **Model 3**: literacy and numeracy taught at different times during the day, but often at the start of a session when the pupils were fresh.

A very small number of the survey schools were more radical. They adopted the strategies in the same positive way, but they made significant adaptations to fit their school's curriculum model.

- | **Model 4**: the elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson taught at different points in the day, rather than as complete lessons
- | **Model 5**: the content of the literacy and numeracy frameworks taught, but integrated within planning for the whole curriculum which made teaching objectives for all subjects clear and explicit.

42. It must be emphasised, though, that the schools using models 4 and 5 were in the minority. Only one school used model 5. It was a one-form entry primary school, with its own detailed schemes of work that incorporated the national curriculum Programmes of Study and drew on the QCA schemes of work. The NLS and NNS frameworks for teaching formed the basis of all the work related to literacy and

numeracy, but there was no literacy hour. Instead, literacy was taught at various points in the day, sometimes for specific aspects of reading or writing that were taught separately and sometimes where particular skills were needed for work related to other subjects.

43. At the national level, Ofsted's evaluation of the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies has shown that most schools followed model 1. However, as the strategies became more firmly embedded, there was an increase in the number of schools adopting model 2.

Schools' approach to curriculum planning

44. The survey schools capitalised on materials that were already available to underpin their planning procedures, rather than starting from scratch. Most of the schools used the QCA schemes of work for long-term and medium-term planning. Much of the planning for English and mathematics was independent of the planning for the non-core foundation subjects: schools made extensive use of the DfES frameworks for teaching literacy and mathematics. A key characteristic of the planning process in these schools, however, was the way they applied their professional judgements and subject knowledge whenever they adopted ready-made material from elsewhere.

45. To ensure consistency, the headteachers provided detailed written guidance about the planning process and what was expected of the teachers. Schools were particularly successful where they had thought carefully about how to make the best use of time and where this was translated into planning guidelines that included a rationale for the daily timetable.

Long-term planning

46. In most of the schools, the co-ordinators for individual subjects were responsible for planning which aspects of their subject or which units of work would be taught in each year group. This provided an invaluable whole-school perspective for each subject and ensured that the knowledge, skills and concepts were developed systematically from year to year. The collaborative approach that was adopted, together with the keenness of staff to refine and improve the planning, helped to ensure the high quality of the decisions made about the curriculum.

47. Schools brought together their plans for each subject into a cohesive curriculum map, which became the long-term plan for the whole curriculum (with the exception of English and mathematics, which were generally planned separately). The form of the long-term plan varied from school to school, in part, but not wholly, depending on the size of the school. Larger schools produced a curriculum map for the seven primary years.

48. Smaller schools with mixed-age classes faced an additional challenge when pupils might be in the same class for two, three or even four years. In these cases, schools presented their long-term plans as two-year or four-year rolling programmes to avoid repetition of content.

Medium-term and short-term planning

49. In the survey schools, there were two main approaches to medium-term and short-term planning. Medium-term plans set out the work to be covered over a period of one term, usually divided into two half-term plans. The short-term plans usually covered the work to be done each week. The key to success in both approaches was the way in which these were seen as complementary; the approach to one influenced the approach to the other within a strategic approach to putting long-term plans for a whole year into practice. The great majority of the schools adopted one of the following:

- | medium-term planning in simple outline but with short-term plans written in detail
- | medium-term planning written in detail but with short-term plans in simple outline.

50. Whichever of the two approaches was taken, the teachers ensured that the learning objectives were as precise as possible. Teachers felt that time spent in planning was a good investment: they felt well prepared and the planning gave them the confidence to teach effectively.

51. In both approaches to planning, teachers used the subject headings from the long-term plan to map the coverage for each subject over a period of time to determine the detailed learning objectives and activities for their class. They did not usually copy out the learning objectives that were already published in their own or QCA schemes of work: they simply highlighted them. This had the advantage of reducing the teachers' planning load, freeing them to spend more time thinking creatively about their teaching and preparation. Reducing the amount of written planning was a priority for many of the headteachers.

52. In the few cases where neither of the above approaches was used, there was still a balance between the clarity of planning and the schools' principles of good classroom practice. Although in these schools greater freedom was given to teachers, medium- and short-term plans were subjected to rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that curriculum intentions were realised and that high-quality teaching and learning were not compromised.

53. The effective use of ICT was a strength of much of the planning at all levels. As a result, the planning was easy to read and understand and could be reused or amended with minimal effort. In several schools, all the written planning was on the school's ICT network. The advantages of this were that senior staff could monitor the planning easily and that the planning was readily accessible to all staff who could learn from one another's work.

54. As they became more confident with the strategies, all the schools realised that the principles of teaching the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson could be applied to other subjects, namely:

- | setting clear learning objectives that were shared with pupils

- | adopting a three-part lesson structure, including a clear introduction and plenary where appropriate
- | engaging in a lively, interactive, direct style of teaching.

Curriculum in Year 6

55. In Year 6, the teachers were determined that their pupils should continue to experience a broad curriculum, in spite of the pressure of meeting demanding targets for their pupils' performance in the national curriculum tests. Nevertheless, they took the view that their Year 6 pupils had an entitlement to the best specific support to enable them to do well in the tests, as well as continuing to develop the full range of skills through the breadth, for example, of their reading and writing.

56. Some schools provided support throughout the year, so preparation for the tests was gradual, but thorough. Others preferred a shorter but more intensive period of support in the spring term prior to the tests. All the schools, however, ensured that pupils understood the test procedures and became familiar with test conditions, including working to a time limit.

57. The forms of support for the Year 6 pupils varied considerably.

In one school every teacher, including the headteacher, was involved in booster support regardless of the year group they taught. As the headteacher said, 'We're all in this together'. During the spring term, one evening a week for 12 weeks, every teacher worked with a group of four or five Year 6 pupils who were all at a similar level. The Year 6 teacher gave additional support during the lunch break to pupils likely to achieve level 5.

During the spring term, the Year 6 teacher in a one-form entry primary school set up workshops, often lasting three days, to provide a series of revision programmes in English, mathematics and science. One workshop focused on teaching pupils to assess their writing against the level criteria used in the national tests, so that they knew more about what was needed to achieve a particular level.

58. After the tests, there was a feeling of relief that an important milestone had been reached, but no relaxation of the high expectations of the Year 6 pupils. Most schools arranged a variety of activities after the national tests while maintaining a balanced curriculum, with no let-up on the pace of work. Maintaining the pace of work and the level of expectation in the last part of the summer term in Year 6 are important in preparing pupils for the demands that are likely to be made on them when they transfer to secondary school. Examples of activities were:

- | residential visits
- | end-of-term productions involving music and drama
- | a safety week involving police, fire, ambulance and coastguard services
- | simulating an investment company's activities with a notional £1,000,000 to invest and pupils adopting roles within the company

- | a design and technology project in which pupils designed and consumed fruit cocktails to celebrate the culmination of their work at the end of Key Stage 2.

In one small school, each pupil researched a topic in depth and presented their findings to the class. The research involved interviewing or writing to experts as well as reading and conducting surveys or experiments. Their presentations made imaginative use of tape or video recordings to illustrate the topics.

In all, while there was an expectation that, in the words of one Year 6 pupil, they would 'have a whale of a time' after the tests, the schools continued to provide a curriculum that would stimulate and engage the pupils. The management of pre-test support and post-test activities was planned carefully as part of the curriculum and was an important feature in all these successful schools.

What did the schools do to make the curriculum work?

Managing the curriculum over the school day

59. In most of the schools, taught time was longer than the minimum teaching day recommended by the DfES in Circular 7/90, and this was often achieved by shortening the lunch break. Over half the schools had lengthened the morning session to allow three subjects to be taught before lunchtime. Other measures to use time more effectively included moving whole-school assemblies to the end of the day to avoid them over-running into lessons, and making a brisk start to the day by giving no more time to registration than was absolutely necessary. Several schools also allowed pupils who wished to arrive early to begin work in the classrooms while their teachers were preparing for the day.

60. In most of the schools, importance was attached to providing extended periods of time so that pupils could work in greater depth, usually involving practical and investigative work that would be difficult to complete in a normal lesson. The schools used various strategies to find these longer blocks of time.

Teaching a restricted number of non-core foundation subjects over a period of several weeks, leaving others to be taught later in the term. This removed the pressure to teach all subjects every week and reduced the planning demands on the teachers.

Practical subjects blocked for several afternoons for a short period, allowing for intensive and sustained work.

Devoting a whole day or, occasionally, a whole week, to one subject or theme.

Teachers spoke enthusiastically about the benefits, for themselves as well as the pupils, of having an extended period of time to enable pupils to become absorbed in the subject and undertake more substantial, in-depth pieces of work.

A good example of such an activity was the production of a newspaper entitled 'Europe News'. The school held a 'Europe Week' during which the pupils engaged in a variety of work covering aspects of most subjects. A small group of pupils took on the roles of reporters or members of the editorial team. The outcome was a very informative and professionally finished newspaper.

How were the pupils involved?

61. Most of these successful schools set curricular targets for their pupils, in most cases grouping together pupils with similar levels of attainment and setting common targets for the group. The targets provided pupils with a clear idea of what knowledge, understanding or skills they needed to acquire in order to make the next step in their progress. A central feature of the way the core curriculum was taught was that teachers ensured that pupils understood the criteria for particular national curriculum levels. Discussion with pupils in the schools confirmed that they welcomed this information 'because we want to do well and know what we have to

do'. Most knew exactly what they needed to do if they were to improve.

62. The schools' focus on curricular targets did not apply only to the core subjects. High expectations, expressed through such targets, and purposeful teaching were evident across the whole curriculum. In some cases, pupils also set targets for themselves.

63. Pupils' involvement in assessing their own work contributed to high standards in several of the schools. This took different forms.

Pupils in an infant school completed 'topic review' sheets under different headings:

- | *What I have learned*
- | *What I enjoyed most*
- | *What I enjoyed least*
- | *What I think I did well*
- | *What I could do better.*

As pupils moved through the school, they became increasingly adept at appraising their own work critically.

In one primary school, a teaching assistant was trained to support pupils in self-evaluation. She spent each morning working with small groups of Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 pupils, helping them to assess their progress against the school's 'I can do' statements. These were in the form of printed statements for each subject, linked to the national curriculum level criteria. For instance in art at Level 2, the statements began:

- | *I can think of an idea for my work*
- | *I can mix different shades of colours in paint*
- | *I can choose the correct brush.*

The date the statement was achieved was recorded in a box on the right hand side of the sheet. As a result of such support, by Year 5 and Year 6, pupils were skilled enough to assess their own performance almost unaided.

It was clear from these schools that pupils achieve best when:

- | they know what is expected of them
- | they know what they have to do
- | they know why they have to do it
- | they understand how it will help them.

64. An inner-city school with a very high percentage of pupils with English as an additional language built on these principles in its approaches to teaching. It gave its teachers detailed written guidance on how to conduct a lesson, ensuring pupils understood what was expected, as follows:

Explain the learning objectives to the children

- a. *Be very explicit about what you expect the children to know, understand and do.*
- b. *Give the instruction first. It can muddle children if the learning objectives are included in the explanation of the task.*

Example: an art lesson – painting a rainbow in water colours

Instruction

Today I want you to paint a picture of a rainbow ('what').

Here is a chart showing the rainbow colours that we have been looking at this week. You have a piece of white paper, a long-handled, flat-headed brush and some water colours. Paint your rainbow as beautifully as you can ('how').

Learning objective

The main thing I want you to do, and it is the reason for your painting the rainbow, is to practise using your brush to blend each colour where it meets the next one. You will be practising the technique of using your brush to blend colours, an important skill in art ('why').

Notes

- | *Display the learning objective – children write it alongside the title of any piece of work.*
- | *Ask the children to repeat the learning objective.*
- | *Ask 'So, what am I looking for?' 'Why are we doing this?'*
- | *At the end of the lesson, assess how well the children have met the learning objectives.*

How did accommodation and resources support the curriculum?

65. In all the schools, the shared spaces and classrooms were well organised and had a sense of purpose. As a means of ensuring consistency, and for the benefit of new teachers, several schools had detailed guidance on classroom organisation, including illustrations showing the best way to lay out equipment and stationery for the benefit of the pupils.

66. The organisation of resources, with teachers' intentions set out clearly in the planning, was particularly effective in one infant school.

Teaching assistants took turns to be responsible for ensuring that teachers

had the resources they needed for lessons throughout the day. This deployment was linked to a very orderly system of resource storage. Initially, storage areas, devoted to music and physical education, were constructed, with equipment attractively displayed in clearly labelled plastic boxes holding resources for a particular topic or study unit. Reading resources were stored equally methodically. The approach was being extended to other subjects, with teaching assistants making the necessary day-to-day items, such as computer-generated, plastic-coated task cards.

67. Schools made good use, throughout the day, of specialist facilities such as ICT suites, halls or indoor swimming pools to help ensure a good balance of learning activities.

Excellent use was made of the pool by employing a swimming instructor, three days a week, to teach every class, thus using it all day and resulting in every pupil becoming a confident swimmer.

68. Imaginative use was often made of any 'spare' accommodation to create resource areas or practical workshops.

A particularly good feature in one school was a small museum established and maintained by the history co-ordinator. Artefacts were carefully catalogued and stored in boxes, linked to history units of work and ready for use in the classrooms.

The schools made the best of the accommodation they had and worked hard to create the environments they wanted. For example, two schools accommodated largely in demountable classrooms still created bright and stimulating learning environments for pupils. There were clear guidelines and expectations with regard to classroom organisation, the use of displays, and standards of tidiness and cleanliness.

69. Outdoor spaces were used imaginatively. Most schools had created environmental areas and provided a range of fixed play and climbing equipment. Others had gone a step further.

One school had created 'Shakespeare's Garden' as a place for quiet activities such as reading and as a place to perform plays.

An infant school had divided the playground into zones for different activities (reading on a grassy bank, a quiet space with seating, an area with fixed agility apparatus, an area for lively play and a game of the week). The game was explained to the pupils at the start of the week and the rules displayed in simple terms in the hall. Each activity was monitored closely by the lunchtime supervisors. The aim of this tightly organised programme was that lunchtime should be a pleasant, sociable and purposeful part of the day.

Contribution of teaching assistants and other adults to the curriculum

70. Teaching assistants and adult volunteers made a significant planned contribution to the quality and breadth of the curriculum in these schools. Teaching

assistants were deployed to make the best use of their strengths and they had benefited from a variety of training linked to their responsibilities. Where the training was tightly focused as, for instance, in how to make good use of questioning, the impact of the teaching assistants was particularly positive.

In one infant school, all teaching assistants were undertaking a GNVQ course: being a large school, the headteacher had been able to arrange for the tutors to hold the course at the school. This generated a shared sense of purpose and enhanced the cohesion of the teaching assistant team.

71. Understandably, during lessons, teaching assistants' time was generally devoted to supporting literacy hours, daily mathematics lessons or pupils with special educational needs. They were also involved with the various intervention programmes associated with the NLNS, such as Early Literacy Support and Springboard, helping to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils had good access to the whole of the curriculum. Some teaching assistants had other responsibilities as well, such as acting as librarians or ICT technicians or helping with assessment. In many of the schools, teaching assistants were particularly effective in promoting the wider curriculum through lunchtime and after school clubs which included ceramics, calligraphy, dance, drama, science, computer and study skills. Teaching assistants were generally paid at instructor rate for this work.

72. The keys to the success of these teaching assistants were:

- | their close working relationship with the teachers
- | their being given time to be involved in planning with teachers, so they were fully aware of learning objectives
- | their being managed by and meeting a senior member of staff regularly, often a phase co-ordinator, but in some cases the deputy headteacher or headteacher. The teaching assistants saw these meetings as a sign of their value to the school.

73. The biggest contribution made by peripatetic staff was in the teaching of music. Many of the schools employed instrumental tutors from the LEA music service. The impact of these tutors was at its best where pupils were able to play with others in ensembles, bands or orchestras. Where such LEA services were not readily available or few teachers in the school were skilled musicians, headteachers resolved the deficiency in other ways.

In order to provide a full and cohesive musical education for its pupils, one school had bought in the services of a commercial music teaching agency. The agency's tutors taught recorder, voice training, movement, listening to and appreciation of music. The headteacher also paid a retired music specialist to train and conduct the school orchestra.

74. To extend their pupils' experience further, the schools attracted a wide range of talented adults to work with them. Some were paid, as in the case of dance groups, actors (for example, portraying Sir Francis Drake or a Roman soldier), theatre groups (a Shakespeare company), puppeteers, artists in residence and wildlife

handlers. But, many schools made excellent use of the talents of people in the locality, who gave their services free:

- | the crossing patrol lady who was a proficient storyteller
- | the caretaker who was a talented percussionist
- | players from local professional football, rugby, cricket and basketball clubs
- | members of local business partnerships who taught pupils about commerce and citizenship
- | parents who provided valuable insights into their work in areas such as art, computers, book illustration, sound engineering, architecture and banking.

One unusual (in its scale) and effective arrangement was the deployment of adults on a voluntary basis in an inner-city school, serving an area with a very high proportion of pupils for whom English was an additional language. Each week up to 200 volunteers, sponsored by a city bank, travelled by taxi from the 'city' to undertake a range of activities with the pupils (reading, numeracy, ICT and chess, with French planned for the future). Each adult partner was linked to a named pupil with whom they worked one-to-one. The headteacher believed this initiative was having a profound effect upon motivation and standards.

75. The impact of the skilled adults was positive because:

- | their inputs had been planned well in advance to meet a particular need
- | they formed an essential part of the work of the school
- | they were used to motivate the pupils and were seen as a means of helping to raise standards
- | crucially, the headteachers and staff were centrally involved in the planning and management of what they did.

76. Many of the schools extended the curriculum by providing a range of out-of-school clubs, organised by paid members of staff and other adults. In several large schools, the number of clubs available was so great that a detailed weekly timetable became necessary. Involvement in these clubs often led to high standards.

An art club run by the art co-ordinator for 12-week periods after school for half her Year 6 class at a time enabled her to extend the art curriculum and provide expert teaching, so that pupils achieved exceptionally high standards in drawing, painting and collage.

In an infant school, 50 pupils attended a chess club run by a volunteer from the local chess club; over a period of years, seven pupils became national champions in their age groups.

77. Such activities also contributed successfully to pupils' social development,

including their ability to establish positive relationships with adults.

A teaching assistant ran a knitting club in which pupils knitted clothing to dress dolls and teddies for charity. The activity was so popular it was attended by almost half the pupils in the school, including many boys.

An urban junior school's 'Junior Club' was open once a week from 6.30pm to 8pm. It attracted almost half the school's 320 pupils and offered a wide variety of well-planned and tightly-structured sporting and arts activities. The club was managed and supervised by parents. Pupils paid a nominal sum each term to cover the cost of consumable materials. It provided numerous benefits, both curricular and social.

78. Part-time specialist teachers also made a strong contribution to the curriculum, particularly in music.

In a large urban school, in which a third of the pupils were learning a musical instrument, pupils played together in string, brass and woodwind ensembles. In addition, the music co-ordinator taught a class, but was given regular non-contact time to train and conduct the 80-piece orchestra. Through their involvement in the ensembles and orchestra, which has performed in many venues outside the school, the pupils saw the purpose in learning an instrument, gained considerable self-esteem and were justifiably proud of their accomplishments.

79. In other schools, swimming, French, Italian, painting and ceramics also benefited from specialist inputs from part-time teachers. In the case of the art activities, the part-time teachers co-operated with the class teachers and planned their input to complement the topics the pupils were studying.

80. What marked out the success of these schools was not only the impressive amount of time and energy given by school staff and volunteers, but also the way the activities were very carefully planned and evaluated. The aim was to ensure that they had a positive impact upon the curriculum as a whole, upon the pupils' attitudes to learning and to the achievement of high standards in the individual subjects.

What was it like for the pupils?

81. The good behaviour, maturity and enthusiasm of the pupils were particularly impressive features of these schools. At all ages, pupils related well to one another and to adults. They capitalised upon the wide range of experiences planned by their teachers and demonstrated a determination to do as well as they could.

82. As well as observing pupils at work, HMI held informal discussions with small groups of Year 6 pupils. Without exception, the pupils saw the relevance in the work they were set and this contributed to their positive attitudes to school. More generally, the level of confidence, independence and responsibility these pupils displayed was impressive. They were made to feel they had a say in the way the school worked and this made them feel more responsible. Many of the pupils had good insights into the challenges and successes of their schools. Without exception, they were full of praise for what their schools had done for them.

83. Socially, the pupils regarded the school as a large family in which they felt happy and secure and where they understood the importance of being considerate to others, well mannered and well behaved. As a result, they had learned to get on with others, made close friends and gained confidence in their own abilities. The pupils explained that they had learned to work as part of a team, to share and to co-operate. One pupil explained that she had learnt that, when working in a group, the people with whom she worked best were not necessarily the ones she would have chosen. Several who had joined the school from another in a different part of the United Kingdom or from abroad said how welcome they had been made to feel upon arrival and how they had settled in very quickly. These Year 6 pupils enjoyed being given responsibilities and took them very seriously, whether it was caring for younger pupils at break times or representing their peers on the school council.

84. The pupils all felt that their schools had given them a 'broad and rounded education', and that it had developed their talents and interests: 'The school's job is to give us inspiration. The teachers have shown us what we are good at and pushed our strengths'. They were also aware of the school's high expectations of them and, consequently, had high expectations of themselves: 'Every day, we arrive in school and know we are going to learn something new'. Every pupil expressed gratitude for the support they had had in preparing for the end of key stage tests because:

- | it had made them aware of the test format and conditions and of the time limitations
- | they were aware of the national curriculum level criteria, so knew what they had to do to achieve a certain standard
- | they recognised the progress they had made
- | the preparation had given them confidence.

Once again, the pupils were full of praise for their supportive teachers who: 'always back us up'; 'never put us down'; 'help us and want us to do well' and 'expect the best of us, but don't force us. She says it's up to us'. One inner-city pupil summarised the attitude of the pupils in saying, 'This school has given me a massively great education'.

Conclusion

85. Two questions were raised at the beginning of this report. The first asked whether it is possible to fit everything that is required into the curriculum, maintaining breadth without the loss of depth in pupils' learning, all within a national context that puts a high premium on literacy and numeracy. The answer to this question, based on the schools in the survey, is that it can and is being done. Not only that, it can be done in ways that result in high standards in English and mathematics, as well as in the arts, physical education and the humanities.

86. The answer to the second question, which concerns slimming down the content of the national curriculum, is closely related to the first. The survey schools achieved their success by using the freedom they have to determine the distinctive nature of their curriculum; they gave some aspects of the programmes of study more emphasis than others. They did not attempt to teach every part of every subject in the same depth, using their professional judgement to select those aspects of the programmes of study that they felt should have more emphasis. In this way, they were able to ensure that the curriculum reflected the particular needs of their pupils and made the best use of their locality. They also decided what, if anything, needed to be added to the statutory curriculum to meet the school's aims.

87. There are implications in these findings for inspections. Ofsted's *Handbook for Inspecting Primary and Nursery Schools* requires inspectors to consider, when evaluating the breadth and quality of the curriculum, 'how the school has made decisions about what will be included in the curriculum, and the time allocated to different aspects'.⁶ The current *Handbook* describes an effective school as one which 'tailors the curriculum' to meet the needs of its pupils. The new framework for inspecting schools, which is being piloted in the autumn term 2002, will require inspectors to evaluate the extent to which the curriculum 'provides a broad range of worthwhile curricular opportunities that caters for the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of all pupils'. Schools that use their professional judgement as those in this sample have done will meet the Ofsted criteria, provided their curriculum has a positive impact on learning and meets the needs of all pupils.

88. Leaving decisions about the curriculum in the hands of the schools, while still keeping what they do within the framework of the national curriculum, is a workable solution to the problems of perceived overload. It was the greater sense of control over what to emphasise in what they were teaching that was the driving force in the schools in this survey. Any future review of the national curriculum should keep this in mind. Reducing the curriculum to a statutory minimum, to be adhered to by all schools, and giving scope for a larger part of the curriculum to be determined by individual schools, would on the one hand, intensify the degree of prescription, while on the other, endanger the entitlement of all pupils to a nationally agreed curriculum of similar breadth and balance.

89. Two further questions will be of interest to policy makers and practitioners: to what extent can other schools be expected to match the achievements of those in this survey; and what training and support would they need in order to do so?

⁶ *Handbook for Inspecting Primary and Nursery Schools*, Ofsted 1999.

90. In answer to the first question, it would be wrong to conclude that the people who are leading and managing the schools in the survey are so exceptional as to make it unlikely that others could achieve the same. As the report shows, the headteachers and staff in these schools have tackled school improvement in a single-minded way. They have seen the curriculum as an important lever for change and as an articulation of their school's values and aspirations. Almost all of the things they have done can be found in primary schools up and down the country, but not all at the same time or with the same degree of coherence. Although the qualities and energy that this degree of success requires should not be underestimated, they are within the scope of competent, rather than exceptional, individuals. This is a significant finding.

91. It is clear from the schools in this survey that the changes and improvements of the kind they have brought about cannot be achieved overnight. Their curriculum has developed over years, not months. Yet there are grounds for optimism that others can learn from their experience, put things into place more quickly, and expect to see their impact sooner rather than later. In this respect, it may be helpful to pose the question: 'What are the keys to success for all schools?'. A number of things stand out:

- The headteachers provide dynamic, imaginative leadership, encouraging everyone in their schools to think deliberately about the curriculum and engage in debate about it.
- The schools have a strategy that encompasses not only how to cover progressively all subjects and aspects of the curriculum, but also the values and attitudes that they are seeking to develop in their pupils.
- Efficient, whole-school planning enables teachers to give more of their energy to preparation and teaching and enables aspects of subjects valued by the school to be covered in depth.
- A recognition by all staff that the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, within a broad curriculum, hold the key to high standards in English and mathematics as well as providing a springboard which can be of benefit to the whole curriculum.
- The headteachers and staff have a passion for a curriculum which is rich, demanding and develops the imagination of their pupils and the creative use of media and materials. They share a belief that a curriculum with these qualities is the key to the growth of pupils' self-esteem and confidence and that this leads to higher standards.
- There is a climate in the schools which capitalises upon the strengths of all the staff, parents and the wider community to provide strong extra-curricular programmes that support their aims.
- The pupils understand the nature and purpose of their learning, in some cases contributing to the planning and evaluation of the curriculum, and they know what they have to do in order to make progress.

92. The above have implications for training and support. We recommend that whatever training is provided needs to:

- | build on the considerable success achieved by primary schools over the past few years
- | encourage headteachers and staff to understand that they have the freedom, within statutory requirements, to provide a curriculum that is distinctive to their own particular needs and circumstances
- | consider issues of continuity in the primary curriculum, including the transition between the foundation stage and Key Stage 1, and between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3
- | ensure that guidance and examples of ways of working reflect schools' different circumstances and the very different starting points from which any curriculum will begin
- | contribute to the national initiative to reduce teachers' workloads, particularly where curriculum planning is concerned
- | emphasise strongly the importance of the headteacher's leadership in developing and improving the curriculum.

Annex: the schools visited in the survey

School name on database

LEA

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Aston Church of England (Aided) Junior & Infant School | Rotherham |
| Barnby Dun Primary School | Doncaster |
| Berrywood Primary School | Hampshire |
| Boxgrove Primary School | Surrey |
| Chalfont St Giles Junior School | Buckinghamshire |
| Christ Church of England Primary School | Camden |
| Claypool Primary School | Bolton |
| Gaddesden Row Junior Mixed and Infant School | Hertfordshire |
| Halley Primary School | Tower Hamlets |
| Hillborough Junior School | Luton |
| Holy Trinity Church of England Junior School | Guildford |
| Hook Church of England Primary School | East Riding of Yorkshire |
| Kempshott Infant School | Hampshire |
| Knowle Church of England Primary School | Solihull |
| Michael Faraday Primary School | Southwark |
| Montrose School | Leicester City |
| Nether Green Junior School | Sheffield |
| Osmani Primary School | Tower Hamlets |
| South Farnborough Infant School | Hampshire |
| St Barnabas & St Philip's Church of England Primary School | Kensington & Chelsea |
| St Cuthbert and The First Martyrs' Catholic Primary School | Bradford |
| St Joan of Arc Roman Catholic Primary School | Sefton |
| St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Birtley | Gateshead |
| St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School | Redcar & Cleveland |
| St Laurence's Roman Catholic Primary School | Knowsley |
| St Michael's on Wyre Church of England Primary School | Lancashire |
| St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School | Hertfordshire |
| Tetherdown Primary School | Haringey |
| Torpoint Infant School | Cornwall |
| West Park Primary School | Hartlepool |
| Weston Village Primary School | Cheshire |
| Woolacombe School | Devon |