Sir Jim Rose

Dear Jim

30 April 2009

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

When we launched the Children’s Plan nearly 18 months ago, I was delighted that you accepted my invitation to carry out a fundamental review of the primary curriculum. I am enormously grateful to you for the rigorous, inclusive and evidence-based way in which you have undertaken this major task, and I am publishing your final report and draft programmes of learning for consultation today.

The primary curriculum will always be a matter of intense public interest. You have consulted widely with subject experts, learned societies, teachers and other professionals, and your work has been informed by excellent practice in our best schools and internationally. Throughout your review you have kept in the forefront of your mind the interests of children and their parents. Your work will make a huge difference to millions of young people, helping to ensure their primary years equip them with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to thrive in their future education and later lives.

I accept all of your recommendations related to the design and content of the primary curriculum, subject to public consultation which I have asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to carry out from today until 24 July.

In particular, I accept your recommendation for primary schools to focus on helping all children develop a new core framework of essentials for learning and life focused on literacy, numeracy, ICT and personal development. This will help ensure that all children leave primary school secure in the basics. I also accept your proposal to simplify and restructure the primary curriculum into six broad areas of learning, within which essential subject content will be organised.

The draft programmes of learning set out the knowledge, skills and understanding which children should learn linked to the overall aims of helping children become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. Setting out the curriculum content in three clear phases across primary will help teachers plan the progression of their pupil’s learning, with individual subject becoming better developed as children progress through primary school. I also agree that a foreign language should become compulsory for the first time from age 7, building on the late Lord Dearing’s languages recommendations.
A number of your other recommendations will support and promote the successful implementation of the new curriculum from September 2011. These include promoting what you have seen as excellent practice in some of our best primary schools relating to teaching reading and encouraging children’s spoken communication skills. Other recommendations relate to helping schools plan for implementing the new curriculum, such as the Government supporting teachers’ professional development to deliver our increased expectations around ICT. I agree that primary schools should have an additional training day in 2010 to help plan for the new curriculum from September 2011.

On the question of when summer-born children should start school, I am accepting your recommendation that children should ideally start school in the September immediately following their fourth birthday, possibly on a part-time basis for some children, but with parents having freedom to choose. You have taken account of the compelling evidence on the benefits to summer born children from starting school at the same time as their peers and that the majority of local authority areas already operate a single point of primary school entry in September. Young disabled children and children with SEN in particular will benefit from starting school as soon as possible so that the right interventions are put in place to ensure that these children also make progress alongside their fellow pupils.

I am mindful however, that compulsory school age does not start until the term after a child turns five and that some parents have a strong preference for their child’s early years experience to take place outside a school setting. I therefore intend to make funding available across the maintained, private and voluntary sectors to enable all children to receive full time provision in education and childcare from the September after their fourth birthday. Alongside making that provision available, we will ensure that parents have clear information about the benefits of beginning reception in September and we will work to help schools and early years settings to smooth the transition for any children who move into reception after September.

Thank you again for your sterling work to deliver this report and the new curriculum proposals.

ED BALLS MP