

Curriculum and Assessment Review

Letter to Minister of Education RE: Statutory Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Primary Schools

24 December 2003

**Rt. Hon. Jane Kennedy MP
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
BANGOR**

Dear Minister

Statutory Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Primary Schools

I write in response to your letter of 19 August concerning my Council's earlier advice on changes to the statutory curriculum and assessment arrangements in primary schools.

Your broad support for the proposed framework and your acceptance of many of our recommendations are appreciated. Since receiving your letter we have given considerable further thought to the issues that you raised. In the attached document we set out response. In some instances those responses provide the further information or advice that you requested. In others we indicate how the additional guidance which you sought will be made available.

As a result our further consideration, we have made some changes to the details of the proposed revised curriculum, and I also enclose amended versions of the curriculum documents. We also propose two changes which are not the direct outcome of matters raised in your letter. The first of these concerns Physical Education. In our earlier advice, Physical Education was included within Personal Development. As a result of recent work on Key Stage 3, it has become clear that it is more appropriate for Physical Education to be designated as a separate area. In my letter about changes at Key Stages 3 and 4, it is proposed that Physical Education should be a designated entitlement at Key Stage 4 also. We therefore recommend a consistent approach across both the primary and post-primary phases.

At a more detailed level, teachers developing sample schemes of work in the area of The World Around Us have suggested that it would be helpful for the material under each theme to be laid out under the separate strands of geography, history and science and technology. There is no change of substance involved and the amendments have been made in the enclosed revised documents.

I draw your attention again to the Foundation Stage proposals. We have commissioned additional assessment of the progress of children taking part in the current pilot so that further information might be available in the late spring to assist in making decisions about the numbers of schools taking part in the pilot from September 2004. More complete data on the larger group of children now in Year 3 will not be available until the

autumn of 2004. This means that a final commitment to the new approach to early years education cannot be made until the autumn at the earliest. This may call into question the feasibility of full scale implementation beginning in 2005 and, hence, have knock-on effects for the remainder of the implementation timetable.

My Council has frequently expressed the view that the process of change resulting from this review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements should not be rushed and that time should be taken to prepare the ground, both in terms of resources and in terms of the professional development of teachers. As you requested we have been collaborating closely with our colleagues in the Education and Library Boards in order to develop a timeframe for implementation and estimates of the costs involved. Whilst good progress has been made there are some further decisions to be made by the Planning for Improvement in the Classroom Strategy Group before a fully costed implementation plan can be submitted. That will, therefore, be the subject of a separate letter early in the new year.

I recently wrote to you on the subject of early language learning in primary schools and provided advice on the development of a long-term strategy to promote it. I hope that it will now be possible for you to make a formal announcement about the nature of the changes that should take place over the remainder of the decade to the statutory curriculum and assessment arrangements in primary schools that will also encompass your decision regarding the long term strategy for languages.

The review of the statutory curriculum and assessment arrangements began following advice from CCEA in February 1999 to the then Minister. In effect, this letter brings the review process as it affects primary schools to an end, as what follows will concern implementation of decisions based on our advice. I would like to pay tribute to the members of my Council during this period and of its Sub-Committees for their commitment and their contribution to what has been a protracted but very productive process. I would also like to emphasise the extent of the consultation processes that have taken place over that time, both formal and informal. I believe that there is great support among schools and the wider community for the nature of the changes that are now proposed and I now commend the course of action that we advocate as a basis for a managed programme of change in our primary schools.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lennon (Dr)
Chairman

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