



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State

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Dear Tim,

## **NATIONAL CURRICULUM REVIEW**

May I thank you and the rest of the Expert Panel for the superb work you have undertaken in helping to shape the Government's thinking as we modernise our National Curriculum?

I am extremely grateful to you, Mary, Andrew and Dylan for the careful thought you have devoted to curricular reform. Your report has helped stimulate an instructive debate. It has been accompanied by a great deal of useful work on how other high-performing jurisdictions structure their curricula.

As the debate has developed, I have been struck by many of the features which characterise the most successful jurisdictions and indeed the highest-performing schools in our own country.

Stronger leadership from head teachers, together with more intelligent accountability and, above all, improvements in teaching quality are the essential elements of high-performing school systems.

Our policies to extend academy freedoms, reform performance tables and inspection and attract even more outstanding people into an already great profession should help raise attainment for all children and help the poorest most of all.

I am determined that the changes we make to our National Curriculum reinforce these reforms. I want our curriculum changes to provide heads with a clear sense of high expectations in the essential subjects of mathematics, science and English. Our curriculum changes should also ensure that schools are held properly and rigorously accountable for helping all pupils to succeed in key subjects. And our curriculum changes must provide the gifted teachers we have in our classrooms with both a

sense of the higher standards that we know they are driven to reach and the freedom to develop more innovative and effective approaches to teaching.

Today I would like to outline how we will reform the primary curriculum in line with these principles and the ideas you have put forward for reform. I will write to you again about the secondary curriculum in due course.

I agree with your clear recommendation that we should define the aims of the curriculum. We need to set ambitious goals for our progress as a nation. And we need clear expectations for each subject. I expect those aims to embody our sense of ambition, a love of education for its own sake, respect for the best that has been thought and written, appreciation of human creativity and a determination to democratise knowledge by ensuring that as many children as possible can lay claim to a rich intellectual inheritance.

We will consult on how those aims should be defined, with a deliberate emphasis on respecting the views, and evidence, produced by those currently teaching who have achieved the highest standards and stretched all their students most effectively. And we will continue to ensure that any change takes into account the experience of other nations with successful school systems.

Common to many of the highest-performing jurisdictions which enjoy great teaching is a clear and structured approach to setting out high expectations, with strong school accountability.

The Government therefore needs to set the same level of high expectations, especially for those subjects which are central to school accountability.

That is why we are publishing new Programmes of Study for primary mathematics, science and English to accompany this letter – as our accountability system is underpinned by how well pupils perform in these subjects.

I want schools to have high expectations for all subjects – regardless of whether they are tested nationally – and set these high expectations out in their own school curricula, which, from September, must be published online and lay out what is taught year-by-year.

This clarity over content will give parents an assurance that their children are making proper progress, safeguard each child's entitlement to a secure foundation on which they can build their own education, and help teachers in each primary year ensure that the necessary knowledge has been mastered before moving on to more stretching content, and indeed to wider curricular choices.

It will be for each school to specify in its own way the year-by-year detail of its own curriculum in every subject. But in order to ensure that our children master the essential core knowledge which other nations pass on to their pupils, we are publishing primary Programmes of Study in mathematics, science and English which



are explicitly more ambitious than ever before.

I believe it is particularly important for us to lay out the content that each child should be expected to master in mathematics, science and the grammar of the English language every year.

In mathematics there will be additional stretch, with much more challenging content than in the current National Curriculum. We will expect pupils to be more proficient in arithmetic, including knowing number bonds to 20 by Year 2 and times tables up to  $12 \times 12$  by the end of Year 4. The development of written methods - including long multiplication and division - will be given greater emphasis, and pupils will be taught more challenging content using fractions, decimals and negative numbers so that they have a more secure foundation for secondary school.

The new draft science Programme of Study is more ambitious about what children can achieve than the current National Curriculum, focusing more strongly on acquisition of scientific knowledge and language with new content on the solar system, speed and evolution.

And in English, the new Programme of Study will ensure high standards of literacy. Pupils will be taught to read fluently and develop a strong command of the written and spoken word. We will strengthen the focus on the fundamentals of phonics, grammar and spelling. There will also be a much stronger emphasis on reading widely for pleasure.

The importance of spoken language in supporting the development of reading and writing will be emphasised, and there will be an expectation that pupils master formal English through poetry recitation, debate and presentation.

In relation to your recommendation that the development of spoken language should be a priority throughout the new National Curriculum, we have also included statements on the importance of spoken English in the new draft Programmes of Study for mathematics and science.

We will continue to consider as the review proceeds how best to ensure that spoken language development is embedded across the curriculum as a whole, for example through the curriculum aims.

Our draft Programmes of Study are the starting point for a debate on content, not the conclusion. I am clear, however, that the debate should be driven by an ambition for all our children to excel, regardless of their background.

In order to ensure that every child is expected to master this content, I have, as the panel recommended, decided that the current system of levels and level descriptors should be removed and not replaced.

As you rightly identified, the current system is confusing for parents and restrictive for teachers. I agree with your recommendation that there should be a direct

relationship between what children are taught and what is assessed. We will therefore describe subject content in a way which makes clear *both* what should be taught and what pupils should know and be able to do as a result.

I have considered carefully the panel's suggestion that, in primary schools, all pupils should be expected to have grasped core content before the class moves on. The international evidence which you provided on this issue is indeed both interesting and important.

I do agree with the panel that there needs to be a relentless focus on ensuring that all pupils grasp key curriculum content. The removal of level descriptors and the emphasis in the new Programmes of Study on what pupils should know and be able to do will help to ensure that schools concentrate on making sure that all pupils reach the expected standard, rather than on labelling differential performance.

In terms of statutory assessment, however, I believe that it is critical that we both recognise the achievements of all pupils, and provide for a focus on progress. Some form of grading of pupil attainment in mathematics, science and English will therefore be required, so that we can recognise and reward the highest achievers as well as identifying those who are falling below national expectations. We will consider further the details of how this will work.

As you rightly point out in your report, it is important that, alongside these reforms to deepen the knowledge children enjoy in mathematics, science and English, we maintain breadth in the whole primary curriculum.

So, while it will be for schools to shape their own curricula, we will maintain a requirement for the teaching of art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, music and physical education across all the primary years. Programmes of Study in these subjects will, however, be much shorter to allow for the maximum level of innovation at school level in the development of content in these areas.

In common with high-performing schools in this country and other high-performing jurisdictions, I want to add breadth to the primary curriculum by requiring all schools to teach a foreign language at Key Stage 2, from Year 3 to Year 6.

The new foreign languages Programme of Study will require an appropriate balance of spoken and written language. Pupils must learn to speak in sentences, with appropriate pronunciation. They will have to express simple ideas with clarity. Pupils should also learn to write phrases and short sentences from memory. They should develop an understanding of basic grammar. And they should become acquainted with songs and poems in the language studied. Teaching should focus on making substantial progress in one language.

We will work closely with the teaching profession over the coming months to determine exactly how the new National Curriculum will be enhanced and assessed. Our guiding principle will always be to learn from the highest-performing schools and give special weight to the experience of those professionals who have done most to



raise attainment for all students and who have helped the disadvantaged most of all.

I am copying this letter to Professors Mary James, Andrew Pollard and Dylan Wiliam and am also placing a copy in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. Thank you again to all of you for all your tremendous work in helping to inform our thinking about how to shape the National Curriculum of the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and a long, sweeping tail.

MICHAEL GOVE