

RESEARCH ON THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

By Andrew Beckingham

A Conservative government in 1988 set the national curriculum. It was the product of that year's Education Reform Act. The aim was:

- To provide a broad balanced curriculum for all children aged 5-16 yrs, irrespective of ABILITY, RACE or CREED.

The National Curriculum was going to change schooling and the education system drastically. Was this change necessarily going to be good or would this just be a continuous experiment that would go on for years and never be correct?

Implications

The bringing in of the national curriculum was going to create much more work for Governors, Head teachers and teaching staff. As the national curriculum meant many more tests for children throughout their years in school as they were to be split into key stages:

Key stage 1 up to the age of 7yrs
 2-was to 11 yrs
 3-was to 14 yrs
 4-was to 16 yrs

At the end of each stage pupils would now be externally examined in a series of tests known as SATS to try and get all pupils to achieve the same standards across the board.

Key aim: This was to raise standards

For this there were many new forms of administration brought in which teachers had to cope with, as well as their teaching, with no extra pay or incentives at all.

Forward planning There was a great emphasis on this, as now every school had to produce a year plan every year as to what would be taught and the targets for the school would be set. Each subject would have to draw up sets of paper work with:

What has been achieved--What the targets for that subject for each year group are--lesson plans and many other things, all of which the teachers do, but get no credit for, no bonus or any pay rise.

Timetables. The schools timetables were now greatly influenced. As there were a number of subjects that were compulsory, such as English, Maths and Science. The government now stated that each child must do these subjects and also have to do a set amount of hours of other things such as Religious studies and Physical education. This tied the hands of head teachers as before they were left to do the whole timetable with few, if any restrictions. They now found that fitting each and every subject that the government wanted with the correct amount of hours as well as other subjects that had taken a back seat would be virtually impossible.

The national curriculum was from the time it was set constantly changing. As the government found that many things did not work and therefore had to be changed. It also got to a point, said one source,

“Where the government brought in so many examinations and evaluations and monitoring systems that tests were being tested and evaluations were being evaluated, it was ridiculous. And the league tables which were brought out created competition between schools and instead of teaching the pupils all the information, they were being taught from an early age just the things that would get them to pass their tests, and make the schools look good. This was the system we had tried to get away from and they were just bringing in another but with more pointless paper work.”

There were also some things that came out of this had long been needed. Sufficient inset for staff, where departments could meet with advisors and heads of departments to discuss problems. Another thing that was established was schemes for parental information, awareness and support.

Some people see the national curriculum as an excellent base for the education of the children of today. But when asking the teachers the general feeling is that a better job could have been done by a five year old when devising the curriculum. As the numerous changes which are constantly being made cause great amounts of stress for all members of staff in a school, and at the end of the day there is no possible way that all children can be at the same standard of schooling at the same time. IS THERE? Definitely not, if the standards keep changing.