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Schools and academies

Leading curriculum innovation in primary schools

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Resource

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1. Executive summary

1.1 The nature of the study

This document is the final report on a two phase study of leading curriculum innovation in primary schools. Phase 1 of the project consisted of interviews in three primary schools and was used to trial and adjust the research tool and Phase 2 consisted of a further set of interviews in seven primary schools. Four interviews were conducted in each school. The research project was constructed with two main dimensions which included analysis of:

- the skills, processes and practices that are required of leadership for successful curriculum innovation in primary schools; and,
- the extent to which schools are currently prepared for curriculum innovation

The main findings of the study as a whole are extensive but are summarised below according to themes derived from the aims of the study outlined in section two. Overall, we suggest that leading curriculum innovation is challenging and complex, but it is welcomed by headteachers and other school leaders, all of whom view the leadership of learning as central to their role. Critically, an ethos for change needs to be created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching.

1.2 Key skills in leading curriculum innovation

Since the curriculum lies at the heart of the core purpose of education, successful curriculum innovation requires the use of high levels of skill in all of the key areas of leadership including strategy development and implementation, human resource management, teaching and learning, financial management, accountability, and liaison with key stakeholders and the community. Leaders of successful schools view major curriculum change as a whole-school activity rather than a piecemeal process. Such leaders carefully assess the school environment as a whole; they use high-level negotiation and communication skills to calculate the needs of the school community; and they work with other staff to negotiate agreed targets that are built into carefully constructed strategic plans. Furthermore, the financial implications of any such change are analysed in detail and planned for and the maintenance of standards is ensured.

The steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation need to be clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned. Thus, negotiation and communication skills need to be of the highest calibre.

1.3 Innovation in challenging circumstances

Curriculum change needs to take full account of and have a good fit with the school's particular contextual needs and circumstances. Where the context is challenging, working in collaboration with other schools in order to share good practice is seen as an especially important method of enhancing curriculum innovation. Visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools, which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation, seem to offer a powerful set of tools that will assist in the achievement of new approaches to learning and teaching.

In larger schools, support for newly qualified and less experienced teachers was part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders. In smaller, one-form entry schools, where there is less opportunity to plan within year groups or to share good practice and successful ideas, heads establish paired partnerships with other, similar sized schools so they could plan and follow through similar themes and topics together. In some schools operating in challenging circumstances, the use of the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning throughout the school was viewed as having an important role in helping schools move towards the curriculum innovation and change.

1.4 Best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation in primary schools

The key leadership skill in curriculum innovation is the judicious and strategic use of all staff in a joint endeavour directed towards the implementation of a revised curriculum. Good leaders recognise the necessity of allowing time and space for reflection, evaluation and a carefully staged process of change with the whole school working in a unified direction. Successful leaders are also prepared to seek advice and to research new approaches to the curriculum, since teachers value explicit guidance in constructing new formats which capture cross-curricular approaches to learning, as well as the skills and knowledge to be covered in specific subject areas. Thus, the process of implementation must be managed, since opportunity to trial and review planning and recording formats is seen as central to the process of change.

1.5 The link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness and improvement

Effectively led curriculum innovation improves standards of achievement and increases children's enjoyment and engagement in learning. The maintenance of a core curriculum and raising standards in literacy and mathematics are perceived by headteachers as a fundamental part of their leadership role, regardless of the type, form or model of curriculum innovation chosen for implementation.

Teachers feel that there is a positive relationship between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness. Although the study could not provide definitive evidence of a causal link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness, it seems unlikely that it is merely coincidental that all the very successful schools in the study had a strong focus on curriculum development. Although, as noted above, major innovation should be a strategic activity, change is evolutionary and dynamic, and proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements.

All the schools in the study sought to enable teachers to have the confidence and the resources to take chances and innovate, within the safety and security of the confidence vested in them by senior leaders. In this way, success in curriculum development was an expectation but not one which put undue pressure on practitioners. It is also notable that the whole school community was involved in successful development, not least were the pupils. For this reason, in the best examples of good practice, children were an essential part of the process with respect to decision making and involvement in the early stages of innovation, and thus felt a sense of shared ownership in success.

1.6 Readiness to implement curriculum at a time of strategic review of priorities in education

School leaders are increasingly confident about taking ownership of initiatives and view the possibility of more local control over curriculum as an exciting and beneficial prospect. Primary school leaders, at all levels, welcome the freedom to innovate, and a commitment to a looser central control over the curriculum as a whole will be welcomed by many, who see curriculum renewal and innovation as central to their professional identity. Best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation ensures that the process of innovation is seen by staff as an opportunity to do things differently, to think laterally and creatively. With this in mind it is clear that any diminution of central control will be accepted quite readily by schools. It may be conjectured that the initial process will not be without its challenges, since a generation of teachers has become inculcated with the notion that the curriculum should be structured in a way that meets central directives in order to ensure compliance with accountability regimes. Such accountability systems will need to be subject to adjustment in order to encourage innovation. The movement towards greater local accountability fits well with this model.

1.7 Conclusions

There was a strong sense that curriculum change is welcomed, especially if it allows and encourages innovation by the schools themselves. In order for effective curriculum innovation to occur, it is clear that an ethos for change needs to be created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching. Curriculum innovation has a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan. Headteachers need to ensure that the principles of inclusion are built into thematic curriculum planning and regularly monitored.

Leadership structures positively impact upon learning in the classroom and successful schools seek to empower teachers through forms of distributed leadership. Middle leaders, particularly where they have responsibility for the whole curriculum rather than a specific subject or group of subjects, need to be given status and value by the head. This is reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings. Successful innovations are more likely to be sustained if leaders ensure that research into a range of possible curricula models is carried out before changes are trialled and implemented, and such 'research' should be seen as the responsibility of all staff. Throughout the process of curriculum innovation effective leaders ensure that struggling staff are supported sensitively. Such guidance and support is more effective when it is not ad hoc but structured into programmes of training and development.

Clear moral and social imperatives feed into and influence innovatory curricula content and pedagogy. Innovation is more likely to become part of the school's ethos and culture when it is built into its leadership structures, professional development, whole-school planning and workable assessment and monitoring systems. Finally, it is important to note that a connected curriculum need not and should not exclude discrete subject teaching.

Based on the results of this study and driven by the feedback of the school leaders interviewed, we offer a four-stage model of curriculum innovation. This is detailed in Appendix 1 of the report but follows the four stages of Researching, Ethos Building, Trialling, and Implementation described below. Other appendices are included which provide elucidatory vignettes and a checklist for successful curriculum innovation.

Within this model or form of curriculum innovation, change is evolutionary and dynamic. It proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements.

1. Researching – including environment scanning to build up detailed knowledge of the school, its parents, community, history and social context taking account of the capabilities, needs and interests of pupils as well as the strengths and expertise of its staff. Building on successful work which the school has undertaken so far to facilitate change as well as ensure continuity and curriculum coherence. This will enable Research into a range of possible curricula models before changes are trialled and implemented. Visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation are encouraged.

2. Ethos building – including creating an ethos for change which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of curriculum innovation. Support is provided for newly qualified and less experienced teachers as part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders. Middle leaders, particularly where they have responsibility for the whole curriculum rather than a specific subject or group of subjects, given status and value by the head and this is reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings.

3. Trialling – including opportunities to trial and review planning and recording formats was seen as central to the process of change. Use can be made of in-school best-practice such as the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning. Working in collaboration with other schools in order to share good practice is seen as an important method of enhancing curriculum innovation.

4. Implementation – including a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan. Steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation need to be clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned. Change is evolutionary and dynamic and proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements. Implementation of agreed change is allied to assessment and review procedures based on best practice from shared and compared experience within and between schools.

Throughout this process a focus on the core curriculum is maintained and a culture of adult learning runs alongside developments in the pupil curriculum so that the skills of leaders at all levels are increased in order to meet the demands of the new and revised approaches to learning and teaching.

2. Introduction

2.1 The challenges of curriculum innovation

This report seeks to examine the leadership challenges posed by the implementation of curriculum innovation in primary schools. The challenges facing primary schools in England are diverse and complex, and particularities and context of curriculum change are examined in more detail in the succeeding section of this document. Nonetheless, the writers feel that it is appropriate to say that there have been few periods when school leaders have faced greater challenge in undertaking curriculum innovation, at a time of strategic review of educational priorities at national and local level. In order to examine fully such challenges, this research project was constructed with two main dimensions which included analysis of:

- the skills, processes and practices that are required in leadership for successful curriculum innovation in primary schools; and
- the extent to which schools are currently prepared for curriculum innovation

2.2 Project methodology and aims

The project employed a blended methodology based on interviews, observations, and documentary analysis, in order to produce rich data. The five main aims of the project are posited in the following research questions:

1. What key skills are required in leading curriculum innovation?
2. How can innovation be encouraged and developed in challenging circumstances?
3. What are the main characteristics of best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation in primary schools?
4. To what extent is there a link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness and improvement?

During Phase 1 of the study, when it was expected that the recommendations of the Rose Review would form the focus for curriculum change during 2010/ 2011, the fifth question was addressed:

5. To what extent are schools ready to implement the recommendations of the Rose Review?

Since it became clear that the recommendations of the Rose Review would not be implemented, this last research question was adjusted for Phase 2 of the project in order to address the adjusted national priorities, as follows:

6. To what extent are primary schools ready to implement the curriculum innovation that will be necessary at a time of strategic review of priorities in education?

The initial findings for Phase 1 of the research programme, outlined in the first section of this report, were derived from the analysis of data from interviews in three primary schools which were selected because of their particular educational challenges and related social contexts. The findings for Phase 2 of the study, outlined in the second section of this report, were derived from interviews in a further seven schools. All the schools involved were highly successful primary schools that had recently embarked on ambitious and varying programmes of curriculum innovation. It was anticipated that research interviews conducted in these schools would produce some illuminating data on the lived reality of curriculum change upon which further investigations could be based. The following analysis shows this to be the case.

3. Context to leading curriculum change in primary schools

3.1 The complex landscape of primary education

The primary school curriculum in England has undergone multiple, complex and overlapping reforms in the last twenty years (Burton and Brundrett, 2005). The debate on the relative efficacy of a strong emphasis on the basic skills when compared to a broader, more integrative curriculum, has been part of the national debate in the UK for a long time. As early as 1978, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) made an important contribution to that debate when they noted that there was no evidence 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 (HMI, 1978). The nature and scope of the curriculum was the central theme in another report by HMI published in 1985, *The Curriculum from 5 to 16*. This report argued that all pupils should have access to a curriculum of similar breadth and balance, irrespective of the school they attended or their social circumstances. 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.

3.2 The drive to raise standards

During the late 1990s and early 2000s primary education in England was dominated 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. Headteachers expressed concern about the problems of overload in the curriculum, perceiving 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. By the early 2000s, however, Ofsted's evaluation of the NLNS revealed that the breadth of the curriculum, particularly within subjects, had 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. Ofsted noted some schools which, although offering a curriculum which contained all the required subjects and aspects, were not providing sufficient depth in their teaching of the non-core foundation subject (Ofsted, 2004).

The University of Toronto, which was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to provide an external evaluation of the NLNS, also noted concerns from many headteachers about the strategies squeezing out other crucial programmes and experience (OISE, 2001). However, in 2002, an Ofsted survey of the curriculum in successful primary schools indicated 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 and more encouragement of staff to make links between subjects, even though the subjects were still being planned separately (Ofsted, 2002). Ofsted pointed out that the headteachers in such schools 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. The teachers planned and taught the curriculum largely through separate subject coverage at both key stages, but they were adept at making good use of links across subjects which strengthened the relevance and coherence of the curriculum for pupils. They also ensured that pupils applied the knowledge and skills learned in one subject to others, thus reinforcing their learning and increasing their understanding and confidence. Good use was made of longer blocks of time, enabling pupils to undertake sustained work on themes covering two or three subjects.

The annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) for 2002, also referred to the pressures on the primary curriculum and their impact on breadth and balance which represented a 'serious narrowing of the curriculum'. In spite of this warning, the report sounded an optimistic note, pointing out that schools 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' (HMCI, 2002: 23).

Such findings were reiterated in 2009 when Ofsted found that 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 and good progression in pupils' learning. 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 (Ofsted, 2009).

Most recently, a survey of 44 highly successful schools which used creative approaches to learning found that most teachers felt confident in encouraging pupils to make connections across traditional boundaries, speculate constructively, maintain an open mind while exploring a wide range of options, and reflect critically on ideas and outcomes. This had a perceptible and positive impact on pupils' personal development, and on their preparation for life beyond school (Ofsted, 2010: 3). The survey also found that assessment plays an important role in creative approaches to learning since it can be used to encourage, guide and evaluate creative learning. In such schools, confident leaders set out a whole-school agenda to disseminate and embed creative approaches to learning. Their persuasive commitment led to well directed professional development for staff, high expectations, rigorous monitoring of outcomes for pupils, discriminating use of partnerships, engagement with the local community and cost-effective investment in technology and teaching resources (Ofsted, 2010: 3).

In some of the most effective teaching and learning seen, open-ended questioning encouraged independent thinking, and teachers succinctly set out the territory to be explored and ensured that the learning objectives were kept clearly in view, while encouraging pupils to make decisions about which avenues to investigate and to reflect on the progress made. Pupils responded enthusiastically and, in most cases, productively to opportunities to work collaboratively, to make choices and to present their work for review by teachers and their peers (Ofsted, 2010: 3).

3.3 The importance of distributed leadership and the role of middle leaders

These surveys reveal that, during this 'initiative rich' era, it became imperative, if primary schools were to comply with the newly established demands of the National Curriculum, that responsibility for initiating these changes needed to be devolved to individual members of the teaching staff, with the backing and support of the headteacher. To be successful, the person responsible requires appropriate skills and knowledge in two distinct fields: generic leadership and management; and subject/responsibility specific (Burton and Brundrett, 2005). The notion of 'subject specialism' was further reinforced by the requirement, during the 1990's, that all new primary entrants to the teaching profession must qualify through receiving specialist knowledge in at least one of the National Curriculum subjects (DES, 1989) to an 'undergraduate' level. Qualification as a primary teacher via postgraduate qualified teacher status (QTS) routes was limited to those who could demonstrate that their degree was mostly or wholly within a subject taught within the primary school (DFE, 1993). The different approaches to the role of curriculum leader were acknowledged, formally, by the TTA (1998) who

defined the co-ordinator as a mainly reactive role and that of the subject leader as a proactive role. Bell and Ritchie (1999:12) amplified this distinction further, and clarified the work of past authors in the field, by separating the *post* of the subject leader from the *responsibilities* that comprise the job description, from the *roles* that they perform in order to meet their responsibilities, which can be broken down into individual *tasks*. To achieve effectiveness during this era classroom teachers were required to demonstrate significant understanding of and the ability to apply a sound appreciation and confident application of the National Curriculum (DFES, 2004a), a clear understanding of Schemes of Work (QCA, 2004) and their interconnectivity (DFES, 2003).

In order to ensure that curriculum leaders have the right skills sets to manage the curriculum, a number of professional development opportunities have emerged, such as the burgeoning school management programmes offered by various universities at certificate, diploma and Masters' levels. Probably the most significant national programme created during this period is the 'Leading from the Middle' programme developed by the NCSL in the early 2000s (NCSL, 2003). However, an alternative, or additional, line of development was provided in the form Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) initiative (DFES, 2004b) which offered the potential of higher status and greater salary if competence could be shown.

3.4 The way forward – the Rose and Cambridge reviews

Although the advent of the National Curriculum brought with it concerns that the subject-based approach which it required would lead to more formal or teacher-centred pedagogic methodologies, 'child-centred' and integrative learning was not abandoned, and the influence of national strategies such as the 'primary strategy' (DFES, 2003) and the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (HMG, 2003) encouraged such approaches. The independent review of the primary curriculum led by Sir Jim Rose was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) under the aegis of a Labour government in 2008. After taking evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, the review subsequently recommended a change from a subject based curriculum to one that embraces six areas of learning including: understanding English, communication and languages; mathematical understanding; scientific and technological understanding; historical, geographical and social understanding; understanding physical development, health and wellbeing; and, understanding the arts (Rose, 2009: 16). The review was influential in leading to proposed alteration to the national curriculum from September, 2011 (DCSF, 2011) but the UK general election and subsequent change of national administration in Spring 2010 to a Conservative/ Liberal Democrat coalition meant that this initiative was cancelled. In a more wide-ranging review, the Cambridge Primary Review (Cambridge Primary Review, 2010), led by Professor Robin Alexander, challenged the conceptions of the Rose Review and posited a more complex formulation which argued for a depoliticization of schools and an end to a 'state theory of learning'. The Cambridge Review's solution to the problems that face primary schooling in England is to extend the foundation stage to age six, prioritise disadvantaged pupils and develop a curriculum based on 12 recommended educational aims and eight domains of knowledge, skill, inquiry and disposition (Alexander, 2009, 261 - 277).

3.5 The new agenda for primary education

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government which came to power in 2010 is committed to giving schools more freedom from unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy. Ministers have made clear their intentions to make changes to the National Curriculum that will ensure a relentless focus on the basics and give teachers more flexibility than the proposed new primary curriculum offered. The Government intends to return the National Curriculum to its intended purpose - a minimum national entitlement organised around subject disciplines. This is set in the context of broader commitments to create a new generation of free schools, give every existing school the chance to achieve academy status, and ensure that Ofsted adopts a more rigorous, targeted approach to inspections. What is clear is that the primary curriculum in England is experiencing a period of unprecedented change with correlative challenges to the leadership of teaching and learning.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data gathering

Data gathering in the project as a whole has two main dimensions:

- **phase 1:** three initial two-day visits during January and February 2010, the data from which has been analysed as a scoping exercise in order to develop the interim report on initial findings by March 2010 and in order to inform the content of the questionnaire to be implemented in dimension 2;
- **phase 2:** a further seven visits to schools during March-June 2010.

4.2 Data derivation

This report focuses on data derived from visits to a total of 10 schools and includes:

- qualitative interviews with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, curriculum co-ordinators and practitioners in three primary schools (a total of four interviews in each school);
- observation of lessons;
- collection of curriculum plans and other curriculum documentation.

4.3 Research instruments

Research instruments took the form of carefully developed and trialled interview schedules and observation schedules. Data analysis relied on coding, categorising and identifying key themes and patterns. Data from interviews was further analysed using the narrative analysis technique which subsequently formed the basis of elucidatory vignettes and overall cross-case analysis of key themes and issues. Elucidatory vignettes are provided in Appendix 2.

4.4 Research sample

A purposive sample has been developed which takes into account school factors such as: type; size; social background of pupils; geographical location; and, system of governance. Schools will be selected by recommendation from key primary networks, QCDA, the National College, Local Authorities, Higher Education Institution placement managers and by reference to Ofsted reports. Full details of case study schools are included in Appendix 3.

The overall sample consisted of four interviews in each of ten schools. Each interview was approximately 40 minutes in length and those interviewed included the headteacher, an assistant or deputy head, a curriculum leader and a classroom teacher. Classroom lessons exemplifying what the school considered to be current best practice were observed in each school and relevant curriculum documentation was gathered and subsequently analysed. Several of the schools are located in areas of considerable social deprivation according to the IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) and each has significant numbers of children who are working below national averages. The headteachers were united in their desire to create a new curriculum which greater numbers of children could access, enjoy and succeed in. Since, at the time of commencement of the study, it was envisaged that the recommendations of the Rose Review would be a key priority, many heads had acquired a close working knowledge of them. However, by the time of the second round of data gathering, it had already become clear that the recommendations of the Rose Review would not become statutory and it seemed reasonable to assume that headteachers had already begun to adjust their priorities in anticipation of the expected adjustments to the curriculum and school governance that were expected by the new central administration such as the increased focus on the core curriculum and the extension of the academies initiative to primary schools.

5. Phase 1 findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings for Phase 1 of the study are set out under the 5 key research questions as indicated in the Initial Report. They are based on 12 digitally recorded interviews (4 in each school) with a cross-section of staff from each of the 3 schools. The transcripts have been analysed for relational links and themes in common across the schools. A search was then made for concerns and issues which emerged from the recorded data as potential indicators of patterns which occurred at both intra and inter-textual levels. The findings also include observational data drawn from lessons observed in the 3 schools. Curriculum documentation, planning pro-formas, tracking, monitoring and progression records were supplied from each school. These were scrutinised for their closeness of fit with the recorded data and used as a basic form of triangulation.

The University's code of practice on research ethics was explained to each interviewee and every effort has been made to ensure that no school or member of staff can be identified. In accordance with the code, the schools have been referred to as A, B and C and members of staff have been given pseudonyms.

The overall impression gained by the researcher from the Phase 1 initial findings was a sense of excitement and vibrant energy about the curriculum innovations teachers and leaders were involved in developing. In each school, the headteachers were giving a strong lead to their staff as well as a clearly defined sense of direction which was part of the bigger picture of curriculum development taking place in their schools. Particularly impressive was the way in which this 'bigger picture' of short, medium and longer term development had been understood and embraced by all members of the teaching teams from the senior leadership team to the newest qualified class teacher.

5.2 What are the key skills required in leading curriculum innovation?

This question evoked very full responses from all the interviewees because they were genuinely involved and energised by the way in which curriculum changes were being developed. The leadership model used was a democratic, participatory one, but the role of the headteacher in directing the changes was crucial.

Simon, the headteacher of School B identified the need for sufficient time to allow change to take place in a carefully staged programme of development without the pressure of a looming deadline:

Heads and their staff need the time and space to do some deep soul searching about what you believe the curriculum should look like. We have spent two terms just thinking. We looked at several models of the curriculum, published schemes and so on We felt strongly that a model of the curriculum for us would have to be personalised and come from our children and what we believed they would engage with.

The staff in all three schools appreciated and valued the headteacher's involvement at every stage of the process from senior members of staff to the newest teacher recruit (see vignette 2).

Team work also meant empowering others to take leadership of clearly identified aspects of the change process. A particularly important feature of this empowerment was the way in which planning for a themed based curriculum was being modelled, led and managed. In School A this was the responsibility of the assistant headteacher. Her documented planning sheets ensured that the required skills and knowledge were being covered across the school along with manageable and accessible tracking, monitoring and progression sheets which were highly valued by the staff. Teachers evaluated the new paper systems in weekly team or whole staff meetings, commented on what did and did not work and modified accordingly.

In school B the headteacher had taken a directive role in instituting change in planning and recording documents by encouraging his staff to take 'a leap in the dark' with a blank sheet of paper to look at what was necessary for planning, recording and tracking from a child's point of view (see vignette 1). He also gradually quickened the pace by suggesting that teachers use the QCDA Progression for Learning guidance to inform their planning.

In School A curriculum innovation had been an evolving process from the day the school opened. In School B it was the creation of an experimental ethos in which all 'all attempts and experiments were valued.' The taking of risks and making mistakes were all seen as part of a necessary, learning process in which lessons would be learned along the way (see vignette 1). One of the leadership skills required in this context is the ability to step back and view dispassionately their school's strengths and weaknesses in relation to curriculum changes. In both School A and C 'teacher experts' were brought in to enrich and strengthen areas of the curriculum which lay outside the school's realm of confidence and knowledge base.

The use of the Early Years Foundation Stage and its commitment to areas of learning rather than discrete subject teaching was, in all three schools, taken and used as a model for development across the entire school right up to Year 6. This had been particularly successful in School A where the headteacher's strategic decision to appoint Clive as the leader of the Humanities team allowed him to exert an influence upon, and act as a role model, for cross-curricular developments throughout the school, including teachers of the later junior years (see vignette 3).

Creating the ethos for change in ways which support the good practice already existing in the school and which take full account of the particular contextual needs of the school was an important finding. So too was the headteacher's willingness to engage the enthusiasm and strengths of the whole staff team.

5.3 How can innovation be encouraged and developed in challenging circumstances?

Changes to the curriculum need to take full account of a school's particular social, environmental and cultural context.

The move towards the implementation of the recommendations of the Rose Review requires ample time for headteachers, staff and parents to think, reflect and grapple with the kind of curriculum change which will best work for their particular school.

Schools will need sufficient time to trial ways of working which gradually move away from a directive curriculum delivery culture and the 'comfort zones' of QCA teaching units. Schools must also preserve what currently works well in the school and build upon it in a process of ongoing dialogue with teachers, children and parents.

The data suggested, clearly, that school must use the strengths and expertise which currently exist among the teaching staff. However, new forms of leadership and organisation will need to be created which move away from subject leadership to teams of responsibility which reflect areas/themes of learning like the Humanities and Creative teams in School A, for example.

It is also clear that headteachers and senior leadership teams need to experience more flexible approaches to the curriculum by working with their staff and engaging in a dialogue with others who have already begun the journey towards new approaches to the curriculum. Nonetheless, it was clear that school must hold onto the rigour of effective planning, monitoring, tracking and progression documents. This has emerged as a key theme in the initial findings. Heads and teachers are more likely to take risks and to experiment if they know *how* to plan and monitor progress in cross-curricular work as distinct from a subject based curriculum.

Using the Foundation Stage as a model for whole school curriculum development emerged as a powerful mechanism for curriculum innovation. Moreover, the evidence from these successful schools revealed that they had adopted a model of curriculum change which best fits the needs of the school according to its current circumstances and needs. Not surprisingly, curriculum innovation does not necessarily require a strict adherence to all the recommendations of the Rose Review at this stage. An enriched, theme based or arts based curriculum which has the effect of engaging children's enthusiasm and interest in new directions can also boost academic achievement in ways which have a reasonably close fit with the above recommendations as reported in School C.

All the schools noted the importance of working in collaboration with other schools in order to share good practice in curriculum innovation. A key tool was to visit schools which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to the curriculum in order to learn more about the problems and successes they have experienced.

The evidence revealed that acknowledging and recognising areas of the curriculum which need strengthening was extremely important as was the ability to engage the expertise of others in classroom workshops and whole school INSET programmes. All of the schools noted the importance of combining resources with nearby schools in order to share the cost of funding external expertise. It is clear that schools which have begun this process have felt invigorated rather than burdened by the experience.

5.4 What are the main characteristics of best practice in the leadership of classroom innovation?

Heads and teachers found it difficult to make a distinction between key leadership skills and best practice. Their responses often conflated the two and a few commented that they felt they were repeating what they had already stated in answer to the key leadership skills questions. However some useful examples of best practice emerged.

One example of this was the continued use of systematic and manageable planning and tracking progress using formats which are adapted to cross-curricular learning.

In two schools, elements of the recommendations of the Rose Review were already being incorporated into teachers' daily planning. In School A, for example its 'Big Plan' for the year included suggestions for topics/themes and a column at the side headed 'Rose Review' under which were a number of related initiatives which the school planned to undertake during the year. In School B, the QCDA progressions for learning documents (from early to the later years) were currently in regular use.

5.5 To what extent is there a link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness and improvement?

In order to make a more considered and evidenced based judgement of the links between the two, a longer period of time is needed for reflection and evaluation which would, of necessity, require some form of quantitative measurement of innovation objectives against outcomes. However some prima facie links were made which merit report.

Simon, the head of School B, believed that because curriculum innovation affected so many aspects of the primary curriculum including organisational structures, content, pedagogy as well as attitudes to learning and achievement on the part of children and parents, *'it was bound to lead to improvement'*.

A significant indicator of improvement for the staff of his school was the marked change in children's attitudes to their work which included greater enthusiasm, stronger commitment and successful achievement.

As the assistant head of School A trenchantly commented: *'you can't have one without the other ...'*.

In both Schools A and B, children were now bringing artefacts and information from home such was their interest in the current theme or topic. Parents too were engaging with their children's learning at home and this was reinforced by further offers of help with resources and knowledge. One parent commented:

'This is the first time I've really understood what's going on in the school. I actually understand what he's (her son) talking about and feel I can join in and add things to what he's learning.'

Paula, in School C was able to quantify the improvement which a class of Year 6 children had made in their writing after a series of workshops on drama and writing activities arising from a shared story. 'After 5 weeks, 90 per cent of children in the class have increased their writing performance by a third of a level.'

5.6 To what extent are schools ready to implement the recommendations of the Rose Review?

Please note that the findings outlined below were current during Phase 1 of the research, at which point it was expected that the recommendations of the Rose Review would form the focus for curriculum change during 2010/2011. This question was subsequently amended in Phase 2 to reflect the change in policy context.

None of the schools felt able to claim they were ready to forge ahead and implement the recommendations of the Rose Review. Each of the heads had begun to outline the pathway for progress ahead and acknowledged that important gains already been made. However, several notes of caution were sounded from one school which had, in fact, already made considerable progress towards these recommendations.

David (School A), reported they were beginning to tease out a number of issues which had been identified for further work. An important issue for each of the heads was a concern that they might lose some of their good curriculum practice and that SATs results might dip as a consequence. David commented:

‘We don’t want to throw out the structure we’ve built into our curriculum work over the years. The new curriculum will still have to have very clear learning objectives so that everyone knows what the children will learn.’

Some teachers were still reluctant to move away from the prescriptions and structured guidance of the National Curriculum and the QCDA teaching units.

However, what was in common to all 3 headteachers was a sense of enthusiasm and energetic anticipation about the forthcoming proposed new primary curriculum because it will, in the words of David:

‘...empower teachers to teach in a way they haven’t had the experience of doing for over 20 years.’

It was recognised however, that not only was there still a long way to go but that teachers trained from the early 1990s onwards would only have received a very narrow training in the National Curriculum and the Strategies which would not have prepared them for the changes recommended by the Rose Review.

This point has already been recognised in the Rose Review as one of the immediate training and development needs. However, it is worth noting that whilst many serving teachers are currently under prepared for a cross-curricular pedagogy, the younger class teachers observed in the Phase 1 schools were discernibly excited about the proposed changes and were keen to experiment with new ways of teaching the curriculum.

6. Phase 2 findings

6.1 Introduction

The findings for Phase 2 of the research project are based on interviews conducted in seven primary schools between March and May, 2010. The schools were selected for their broad representation across type, size, intake and location. Three were Church of England schools set in both rural and suburban locations, one was a junior school in an affluent part of an industrial suburb and three were urban city schools. In the case of the latter, the majority of pupils came from diverse ethnic backgrounds and many did not have English as their first language with significant numbers in the process of learning to speak their third and sometimes fourth language. The geographical spread included schools selected from the North and South midlands and the South East of England. The smallest school had a pupil intake of 130 and the largest, over 700. All the headteachers in the research schools had a history of successful curriculum innovation with three having been closely involved in the independent review of the primary curriculum as members of its *0-14 Advisory Group* whilst a fourth had been part of the Qualifications, Curriculum and Development Agency's (QCDA) submission to the review's evidence base. All of the primary schools selected had an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding in their most recent inspection.

6.2 Similarities and differences between the Phase 1 and 2 schools

The heads and staff of the Phase 1 and 2 research interviews all, in varying degrees of strength, articulated a strong and often, passionate conviction that curriculum change was both necessary and desirable. Many believed that the existing, subject-driven National Curriculum and the over prescriptive, pedagogically determined National Strategies were not enabling children to access the transferable skills necessary to cope successfully with the requirements of the 21st Century. More importantly, large numbers of children who were performing well below national averages were not able to access the overburdened, content driven curriculum of the last three decades and were likely to continue to underachieve unless significant changes were made to the curriculum in their favour. In the three Phase 1 schools visited earlier in the year, heads and their staff had begun the process of freeing up their school curricula to make meaningful links across subject areas, provide greater space for creative work, particularly in the arts and humanities, and made increased provision for ICT hardware and software in the belief that ICT should play a much bigger part in children's learning. The central problem they were grappling with was how to create a more flexible, imaginative curriculum without jeopardising standards of achievement and levels of performance. They were also trialling various forms of monitoring and tracking systems which would give them the same quality of information on children's progress as those currently in place for the core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum. Safeguarding the rigour of all that they had achieved with respect to children's achievement and targets for improvement was of paramount importance in their plans for curriculum innovation.

The heads and teachers in the Phase 2 research schools were much further ahead in their progress towards resolving these key concerns and some of the schools had already given the proposed new primary curriculum a trial run. This was partly because four of the headteachers had been closely involved in the independent review of the primary curriculum and had trialled some of the materials in their respective schools, and partly because work towards an alternative curriculum was already underway in their schools before the review had published any of its findings at either the interim or final report stages.

Another key difference was that in the Phase 1 schools, there was still some reluctance to depart from the guidance provided by the QCDA Schemes of Work and the Primary Frameworks for Literacy and Mathematics (2007) whereas in the case of some of the Phase 2 schools, these had been long since abandoned because they were perceived to be too limiting and no longer fit for purpose in their plans for a much broader and more flexible, inclusive curriculum. However, literacy and mathematics continued to be a significant part of newly designed curricula. Another feature of the Phase 2 findings was the strong emphasis placed on the social, moral and emotional development of children which

headteachers and their staff believed should be a major, interlinking thread in both the content and pedagogy of their newly conceived curricula. Finally, possibly as a result of the preparatory guidance issued before the Phase 2 research visits, key leadership skills and the characteristics of best practice in leadership were much more clearly differentiated than was the case in the Phase 1 research findings. In common with both Phase 1 and 2 findings, there was a sense of palpable and observable excitement about the results which their curriculum innovations had so far produced. Teachers were also energised by the enthusiastic responses of children and parents to their theme based curricula. In the Phase 2 schools levels of achievement and standards of performance in both core and foundation subjects appeared to have risen, not declined as some might have feared. In one school, the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving Level 5 in English in recent years, barely reached the required national expectations. Since curriculum changes to both content and pedagogy the number of pupils gaining Level 5 had now risen to 50 per cent. Improvement was not only evidenced by higher scores in the Key Stage Two SATs but discernible progress had been made by children across the ability range including children with special educational needs.

All of the 10 schools which were visited between January and May of this year had headteachers and staff who were strongly committed to the curriculum principles and changes proposed by the new primary curriculum. In the Phase 1 schools, two of them with very challenging circumstances, had made considerable headway either on the route to implementation or had incorporated some new curriculum elements of their own design. In the Phase 2 schools, all the schools had either already implemented the proposed new primary curriculum, were ready to do so, or had devised a curriculum of their own which espoused similar values and educational principles. The other difference was that all the schools which took part in the project, were, according to recent judgments by Ofsted or HMI, Outstanding or Good schools. Three of the serving headteachers had been responsible for leading their schools out of Special Measures or Satisfactory grades to that of Outstanding whilst two had maintained their grades of Outstanding over at least two inspections. The other two schools were graded Good with Outstanding Features. In many senses then, the heads and teachers in the Phase 2 sample were a small, élite cadre of highly successful practitioners who, are argued to be in a strong position to generate some immensely useful findings on the complex but achievable relationship between leadership and curriculum innovation.

6.3 The Findings

The findings are set out under the 5 key research questions as indicated in our interim report. They are based on 32 digitally recorded interviews (4 in all schools except one very large school where 8 interviews were recorded) with a cross-section of staff from each of the 7 schools. The transcripts have been analysed for relational links and themes in common across the schools. A search was then made for concerns and issues which emerged from the recorded data as potential indicators of patterns which occurred at both intra and inter-textual levels. The findings also include observational data drawn from lessons observed in the 7 schools. Curriculum documentation, planning pro-formas, tracking, monitoring and progression records were also supplied from each school. These were scrutinised for their closeness of fit with the recorded data and used as a basic form of triangulation.

The University's code of practice on research ethics was explained to each interviewee and every effort has been made to ensure that no school or member of staff can be identified. In accordance with the code, the names of schools, the headteachers and members of staff have been fictionalised. A thumbnail sketch of each of the seven schools and the names and roles of those interviewees whose responses were used in the findings paragraphs, are provided in Appendix 6.

The five main aims of the project are contained in the following research questions:

1. What key skills are required in leading curriculum innovation?
2. How can innovation be encouraged and developed in challenging circumstances?
3. What are the main characteristics of best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation in primary schools?
4. To what extent is there a link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness and improvement?
5. To what extent are primary schools ready to implement the curriculum innovation that will be necessary at a time of strategic review of priorities in education?

The findings paragraphs are presented under each of the above research questions although not necessarily in the same order.

6.4 What key skills are required in leading curriculum innovation?

A feature which emerged early on the research visits was the significance of the catalyst and rationale for change insofar as it provided a clear, school-specific focus for curriculum development which was complex and multidimensional. For example, when a new headteacher took up her appointment at Tern Street Primary School, most of the children were performing well below national averages, pupil behaviour was causing serious concern and the school had been placed in an Ofsted 'Special Measures' category. The scale of curriculum change needed could not be accommodated by tinkering with content or driven by a staff which was demoralised and professionally ill equipped to rise to the challenges which the new head deemed were necessary. Innovation needed to occur at the content level in order to make the curriculum relevant, stimulating and intellectually engaging for a culturally diverse pupil intake with a history of poor achievement.

To have succeeded in making this one change, might in itself be considered a laudable beginning. However, a single change in one aspect of the complex business of curriculum innovation was a necessary but not a sufficient condition, to meet all the challenges currently facing the school. For example, it would be unlikely to produce (as a knock-on effect) the kinds of systems needed to ensure that desirable change was sustained over a period of time. Standards need to be raised, pupils need to improve their levels of achievement and robust systems of assessment need to be formulated which have the power to yield regular information to teachers, pupils and parents in order to ensure that there is evidence of an upward achievement profile, and if not, where the gaps and problems lie. This requires a coherent and strong professional team of staff who are wholly committed to these ends. In a large school, no single person can keep abreast of the quality and detail required to keep every teacher and teacher assistant fully informed of individual pupil progress as well as in-class and across class progress. This requires changes to the way in which leadership responsibility is devolved, shared and structured throughout the school.

In the ambitious programme envisaged by Tern Street Primary School, a decision was taken to organise the curriculum around themes which would take children on a number of *learning journeys* (the school's term for specific themes or projects) across interlinked subjects. In addition much more prominence would be given to the role which children played in making their own decisions about how and what they learned, than had been the case hitherto. New forms of learning would require new pedagogical approaches along with a team of staff who had the ability and commitment to instigate this new approach to learning. A coherent vision for future staff recruitment would also need to be implemented. Similarly, the way in which the school organised its leadership at the top, senior and middle levels of responsibility needed to be changed and restructured. The physical environment was, at the time, not fit for purpose (see appendix 7) and parents, school governors and the wider community needed to be involved in discussions about the kinds of changes which would transform the building into a learning environment which ensured greater success and enjoyment in both learning and teaching.

The point of this example is to demonstrate a principle which pervaded much of the interview data. If curriculum change is to result in successfully meeting the challenges of the kind set for this school, it needs to take place at a number of levels: content, pedagogy, recruitment, leadership structure and infrastructure. Indeed, the findings show clearly that the most impressive and successful examples of curriculum innovation were the outcome of an exceptionally strong interrelationship between all the above and not merely the sum of its parts. Two important points emerge from these findings on the relationship of key leadership skills to curriculum innovation: firstly, the relationship is complex and multi-layered and secondly, its particular form is strongly bound up with the social and historical context of the school. The findings therefore need to be viewed with these factors in mind in order to avoid them being misconstrued as recipe knowledge and a 'one size fits all' interpretation.

6.4.1 Having a Vision

Vision was the first thing to come to mind when heads were asked to articulate the key skills they had used in order to bring about successful curriculum change. For these heads, having a vision meant far more than an aspiration, an imaginative plan or a desire for a particular outcome for the school. Whilst some or all of these might have played a part, what was striking was that whatever the nature or context of their particular vision, it was informed by a particular set of strongly held values and beliefs. At the centre of these was the role which children and staff would play in the achievement of their vision and the way in which these relationships would be fostered and developed in the process. For example, Laura, the head of Tern Street Primary School, believed strongly that children were at the heart of their belief system. However, whilst she was keen to know what children's reactions were to the new curriculum initiatives she was driving forward and for their voices to be heard, her most important priority was to raise standards of achievement and she was resolute in her determination not be diverted from it:

... it's part of the vision of the school that every child makes accelerated progress here, because if they don't, then their life chances are diminished. If we teach well, ... if the teaching was merely satisfactory, then the children will leave here well below national expectations, as they joined us. We have to do something different to shoot them forward.

(Laura, headteacher: Tern Street Primary School. Research interview: 04/05/10)

A different view was taken by Beatrice, the headteacher of Heronsgate Primary School (see Appendix 7) who, because of the racial tensions both within the school and in its immediate community, believed that a high quality inclusion agenda was as important as raising standards. A significant percentage of the children in her school had such a wide range of severe special needs and physical impairments that she and her staff took the decision not to use the National Strategy Frameworks in Literacy and Mathematics because high numbers of pupils could access neither its content nor pedagogy. Whilst children made discernible progress and improvement, many continued to manifest a below average national profile and were likely to continue to do so. Her priority therefore, was to create a curriculum which was relevant to the children's lived experience and which took greater account of the community's social and historical context. Of equal importance was the creation of an inclusion culture in which children and parents were listened to, valued and positively affirmed, regardless of acts of aggressive behaviour, offensive language and other forms of challenging behaviour. In order to achieve her vision she ensured that her staff were trained using the psychological tools of emotional intelligence and the principles of coaching. Over the years, this became part of the school's culture in which staff interactions were characterised by what she termed, *constant questioning conversations* which were non-judgemental and which conferred the responsibility for improvement in classroom practice to the individual teacher rather than a senior manager. Staff training days were highly valued opportunities to revisit and re-affirm the school's values as part of an ongoing team building programme. In another school changes in the curriculum started with a group of children who were representatives on a pupil

curriculum group. So highly valued were their views that they were invited to join the staff on an 'Away Day' conference to present their ideas on what a new curriculum might include. The strategic decision on the part of the headteacher to give children a key role in shaping a new curriculum, empowered both pupils and staff to pursue new approaches to learning which led to a dramatic increase in the quality of children's work and improved SATs results in Year 6.

In some cases a head's vision had been the result of inspiration drawn from a variety of external sources. For example, Cathy, the headteacher of Wrencroft Primary School, had been inspired by a teaching framework called *Thinking Actively in the Social Context* (TASC) which sets out to systematically develop children's thinking skills and independence in learning. All her staff had been trained to use the materials and tools offered by this programme. Such was its positive effect upon pupils and teachers that it became the catalyst for the development of an enriched and 'connected curriculum'. Another headteacher had been on a course on how to plan and organise a creative curriculum. This had so inspired her that 'the creative curriculum' became part of her long term vision for the school.

Having a vision is self evidently important but it is of limited value unless school leaders can communicate it well and 'sell' it to staff. 'Selling the message' to key members of staff was seen as crucial to the early stages of change. Higher order communication skills were considered to be crucial by senior leadership teams in persuading staff that this was the 'right' direction for their school. Of significant importance too was the ability to make unequivocally clear and explicit the values and beliefs skills which underpinned the headteacher's vision for the school. Where members of staff were reluctant to 'buy' the vision this sometimes meant a tougher message had to be communicated. This point was put trenchantly by Laura of Tern Street Primary School at an early meeting with the staff: *'... you know this is what I stand for, sign up for it or ship out.'*

The articulation of a well communicated vision was seen as a central leadership skill in constructing a changed curriculum, but the extent to which it would be adopted, implemented and sustained was closely dependent on an accurate reading of the school's current educational and social context. However, the articulation of the school's vision was not confined to headteachers alone. It was not uncommon, for example, to observe school administrators, teacher assistants and classroom teachers also communicating the school's vision, often with noticeable pride and enthusiasm. From this it is suggested that vision is more likely to become an important part of the school's culture when its messages and central values become part of the discourse of all school personnel. Laura, of Tern Street Primary School took every opportunity to reiterate her vision in a wide variety of meeting contexts in order to make sure her vision was firmly embedded in all the work she and her staff were developing in newly constructed curricula:

'... So there's expressing the vision you know through formal teacher days, through professional development meetings. I knew it was beginning to be successful when other people were articulating that vision, not me ...'

(Laura, headteacher: Tern Street Primary School. Research interview: 04/05/10)

6.4.2 Knowing the school context

Whether the imperative for change was an unsatisfactory Ofsted judgement or the desire to make the curriculum appeal more strongly to pupils, a common finding across the schools visited was the importance of embedding innovation in the cultural, social, historical and educational circumstances of the school. For example, in one school set in an affluent suburban town, the school had, in a former inspection, achieved a disappointing Ofsted judgement of satisfactory even though the majority of children's achievements were above national averages at Key Stage Two. Parents were unhappy about the outcome since they had very high expectations of their children and the school.

At the same time the intake to the school was slowly changing as a result of growing numbers of large houses being sold off to developers who redeveloped them as smaller and more affordable housing units and flats. This resulted in a slowly increasing intake of pupils from a range of ethnic groups, some of whom arrived at the school with special educational needs. Partly as a result of parental dissatisfaction and the demographic change in the school's intake, the decision was taken by the Headteacher and his deputy to introduce the kind of pupil led, creative, theme-based curriculum they had both believed in for many years.

The rationale for these changes was to improve their Ofsted grade and to increase parents' understanding and respect for the work which teachers were doing to improve standards and greater pupil involvement. As a result of initiatives like curriculum weeks when the whole school explored a single theme for five days and curriculum mornings where teachers and parents worked together pooling their knowledge and expertise, the trust and professional respect shown by parents towards the staff improved markedly. The school also achieved an Ofsted Grade 1 (outstanding) largely for the high quality inclusive, inventive and creative work they had done in language teaching and music making. This example serves to show the central importance of a knowledgeable and an accurate reading of the school's current and changing context. It also underlines and vindicates the head's and deputy head's decision to remain faithful to their belief system and act upon it.

Two rural schools, both of whom had sustained an Outstanding Ofsted grade over two inspections, wanted to invigorate their curricula in ways which made it more connected and cohesive. Their first principle for changing to theme based learning was to hold on steadfastly to what worked well and then from this baseline to focus specifically on what they thought would move the children forward in their learning and understanding. Its success was to some extent, dependent on a secure knowledge of their respective staff's strengths and weaknesses.

Equally important was an accurate judgment about who could drive the change forward in ways which would take the rest of the staff with them. This becomes especially important in small, one-form entry schools where teachers do not have a parallel year colleague with whom to share planning, ideas and how to track progress. Whether it is the headteacher or a designated curriculum leader who is responsible for leading the desired curriculum innovation, it is important (especially in a small school), that less confident members of staff are fully supported with appropriate guidance throughout the process of change. In a much larger, urban city school, knowledge of her staff and the changing needs of pupil intake from homes with either very low or no regular income were of central importance in steering the school's child-focused curriculum through to a very successful outcome. Bridget, the headteacher of Swift Avenue Junior School, changed the middle leadership structure from subject leaders to curriculum leaders for the lower and upper school. At the same time, because of her concern to improve the levels of achievement of Year 6 pupils, she appointed a deputy headteacher whose main responsibility was to oversee standards and assessment across the school. Bridget makes the point well:

'... the present structure I'd got then wouldn't fit how I wanted to see the new curriculum developing, because we wanted to bring the subjects all together, and I also needed to have some strong people to lead it through, who would sell it to the staff, well give the security I think in a way, guide the other staff through, to actually be there to help them.'

(Bridget, headteacher: Swift Avenue Junior School. Research interview: 27/04/10)

It is likely that these decisive appointments were closely related to the dramatic improvement in pupil standards with the consequence that 50per cent of Year 6 pupils now achieve Level 5 in literacy. Demonstrable progress was made too in the progress towards the desired curriculum innovation. An essential leadership skill is therefore not only a detailed knowledge of the school's current context but an ability to 'read' it intelligently and act on it in accordance with the perceptions and understandings arising from it.

6.4.3 The school ethos and environment

Vision and ethos were frequently mentioned in the same sentence although the terms were not used interchangeably. However, they were clearly closely related and both were viewed as equally important by headteachers. One useful way of distinguishing them might be to consider 'vision' as that which can be explicitly stated and described whilst 'ethos' is more inferred and implicit. For example, references to ethos were associated with sensory experiences like tone, atmosphere and the 'feel' of a school as displayed by the behaviour of teachers and pupils in relation to each other. Ethos therefore seemed to be more about what individuals might sense, or 'pick up' as they entered the school. However, these sensory messages had not occurred by chance; they had been consciously created. Considerable emphasis was given to the importance of ethos and the role it played in creating the 'right' conditions for successful curriculum change. The physical environment and the messages its particular features gave to pupils, staff and visitors was, in some schools, another significant aspect of ethos. The type and form of ethos varied according to the school context but in common with all the findings was that it arose from the head's vision and the school's values and beliefs. The creation of a desired school ethos was generally one which had developed over time and which was the result of ongoing discussions between headteachers and leadership teams as well as school governors and parents. Phrases like 'a good feel,' 'a happy atmosphere' and 'buzz' were typically used when talking about ethos. In the Phase 1 data the kind of ethos which lent itself readily to change and the uncertainty which sometimes goes with it, was expressed as an 'ethos for change'. This included supported risk taking, freedom for experimentation and the trialling and piloting of new teaching approaches and this is largely replicated in the Phase 2 data. Some variations and additions to the above are exemplified below:

Wendy, headteacher of Finch Lane Primary School, spoke of the importance she attached to an 'enabling ethos' in which everyone was on a journey together and where teachers felt they could 'have a go' at a new teaching approach without feeling that they would lose face if they made mistakes, or if the idea did not work at the first attempt. For Cathy, the headteacher of Wrencroft Primary School, the sustaining of a 'can do' ethos was a key part of the ethos in her school. This was not always easy to sustain in the ever present pressure she and the staff her were under to maintain their Ofsted Grade 1 judgment and she was conscious that she needed to be alert to any signs that this positive attitude and well being in teachers or children was in danger of weakening. Both Cathy and Wendy felt that they were the 'lynchpin' for the creation and the sustaining of their desired ethos. Indeed, there was some evidence to suggest that headteachers of smaller one form-entry schools had a considerable burden to bear in the creation of an ethos conducive to change whereas heads of larger schools were more able to share the responsibility for its maintenance and upkeep across their leadership teams.

In Ravenscroft Junior School, there was a need for considerable staff development before cross-curricula and whole-school theme based approaches could be successfully introduced and implemented. The adoption of a coaching and mentoring ethos which built on the mutual trust and respect which the staff and the Head and his deputy had already established, was of fundamental importance in their journey towards successful curriculum innovation as Andy, the deputy head, makes clear:

'I think it's also the relationship that we've built up with people and the ethos of the school as a whole and the way we approach people and ask them to do things, and how there is that mutual respect, it's not all top down. For example, I went on a coaching, improving classroom performance through coaching last year so now the professional development is done in a coaching style, which is in a way kind of what was my philosophy before, but I think now it's even stronger.'

(Andy, deputy headteacher: Ravenscroft Junior School. Research interview: 09/03/10).

The distinction between coaching and mentoring in schools used by headteachers was that in the former, the individual was led to better practice by a series of questions and prompts based on observed behaviour by a senior or more experienced member of staff. In the case of the latter, progress in classroom practice was judged and weighed against a set of agreed criteria, like the TDA Standards for reaching Qualified Teacher Status, for example. A coaching, listening and mentoring ethos was signalled by many heads as another key feature of an ethos in which changes in attitude, interrelationships, pedagogy and content were considered to be an integral part of a supportive, innovatory culture.

In two of the largest schools, the physical environment of the school had been altered in recent building programmes to include a conference room and staff rooms large enough to accommodate sizeable numbers of people for formal and informal meetings and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions. These rooms were equipped with interactive white boards, computer facilities and coffee machines in order to facilitate high quality professional discourse. The availability of resources of this quality gave very clear messages to staff that they were highly valued as professionals and that the outcome of their meetings was as important and as serious as a board meeting might be in a moderate sized business.

Establishing an ethos which is appropriate for the school and one which will facilitate change, innovation and risk taking was seen by headteachers as a vitally important aspect of their leadership. It was not unproblematic however and heads of smaller schools had to work especially hard to ensure that it was constantly maintained and 'on track'. Ethos manifested itself in different forms depending on the school's particular context but common to all schools visited, was its close relationship with the schools' beliefs and value system and its overall vision.

6.4.4 Leading the process of change

This section will deal with the process and strategies involved in curriculum innovation; in short, *how* innovation happens. The findings demonstrate a remarkable degree of congruence and consistency across the Phase 2 schools. However, whilst there is a high degree of similarity in the processes and strategies used, there are variations according to the school context and the particular point of development they had reached in their respective programmes of change.

Headteachers and curriculum leaders frequently spoke of the importance of giving their staff 'permission' to experiment with new ideas and different pedagogical approaches based on theme based approaches to learning. The granting of permission did not occur in the literal sense but had more to do with the creation of a climate in which risk taking, trial and error and 'having a go' was explicitly encouraged and part of the necessary conditions for successful innovation, particularly in the early stages. However these institutional changes are located in the context of related national changes. Legislation from 2004 onwards had, in the view of some of the heads, already signalled the green light for more creative, flexible and imaginative ways of teaching the curriculum. An emphasis on children's enjoyment, excitement and engagement was a key part of the *Excellence and Enjoyment* strategy document (DfES 2004). Similarly, the New Frameworks for Literacy and Mathematics (DfES 2006) were simplified and greater scope was given to teachers to teach literacy and mathematics through other subjects. The agenda of *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2004) was centrally concerned with children's wellbeing including their experience of learning at school. For many heads and teachers, the cross-curricular approaches and greater freedom for schools to develop their own localised curricula recommended by the Rose Review (DCSF 2009), seemed a logical extension of the incremental shift away from rigid prescription towards greater freedom for teachers to make their own curricula decisions.

Wendy, headteacher of Finch Lane Primary School, highlights the significance for her of the beginning of this shift:

'... something I found really important along the way were the Excellence and Enjoyment documents which came out, and they happened to come out just as I was appointed head here and I thought well fabulous because this is taking away the straitjacket I felt. So we very much embraced that approach from the point of view that if your outcomes are alright, how you get there is actually down to the individual school.'

(Wendy, headteacher: Finch Lane Primary School. Research Interview: 28/04/10)

In smaller schools the leadership of curriculum change either fell to the headteacher or to a designated teacher. In Finch Lane for example, Tricia had been given responsibility for leading the curriculum. At the time of the interview her current target was to lead the school in a creative curriculum which had been largely inspired by a recent course she had attended on creative thinking skills. Initially, she chose to trial some new approaches with her own class before sharing them with the rest of the staff. She later shared her ideas, including her planning for progression and monitoring documents, with the rest of the staff. Teachers were then, in turns, invited to observe her teaching during their Planning, Preparation and Assessment time (PPA). This period of observation was followed by a staff CPD session on how to plan for creative lessons. She then worked alongside them in their respective classes helping them at both the planning and delivery stage. As teachers became more confident with theme based learning approaches, the headteacher initiated a series of Special Curriculum Days in which there was one, specific focus either on a subject or an idea like 'the Victorian School', for example, which the whole school followed for an entire day. Each teacher would take responsibility for planning and resourcing a chosen aspect of the focus which any year group could choose to follow. This gave both children and teachers an opportunity to work outside their year group. These special days were perceived by both teachers and pupils as exciting and intellectually engaging learning experiences which

gradually became part of the school's culture. The curriculum days were evaluated both by staff and children and areas for improvement were noted and implemented for the next occasion.

Larger schools, with two or three form entries, were able to trial innovative ideas in one year group at a time. This meant that two or three teachers could meet together to plan their chosen topic or theme and evaluate its successes and problems as a year team. This is an advantage which is not available to smaller schools which are dependant on the headteacher or designated curriculum leader to steer and orchestrate the change. Curriculum innovation therefore has to be a whole school venture right from the start. Larger schools were able to roll out change with one year group at a time. Crucial to its success was the appointment of key middle leaders who were *curriculum* rather than *subject* leaders and who would oversee innovatory development through to its eventual implementation. In almost all schools visited in both Phase 1 and the Phase 2 schools, headteachers had made the strategic decision to abandon subject leadership in favour of curriculum leadership or specific areas of the curriculum such as the humanities or creativity or science and ICT, for example. The appointment of middle leaders who could drive change through and cope with the inevitable uncertainties and difficulties associated with new ways of teaching were central to its success. Part of the process of innovation also involved a gradual shift away from prescribed schemes of work, like those constructed by the QCA and the National Primary Strategies, for example. Some headteachers had abandoned them completely as being too limiting and no longer fit for purpose whilst others were in the process of doing so.

Principles of the process of change

Several principles relating to the processes of change can be drawn from these examples:

- In all the schools visited, heads and leaders from senior management downwards, emphasised the importance of setting one clear goal at a time and proceeding with change in one class or year group at a time.
- The same processes were followed whatever the size of the school and a frequently quoted mantra was, 'Think big but start small.'
- Rolling out change a bit at a time ensured that teachers did not feel swamped with too much change too soon. Teachers valued headteachers who knew when enough was enough.
- Sharing, monitoring and evaluating new programmes needed to go hand in hand with the construction of new systems of planning, monitoring and tracking progress which worked as effectively with cross-curricular as it did with subject based approaches. This latter was, without question, a very high priority.
- The maintenance of standards and rigorous monitoring against clear success criteria was emphasised by all those interviewed. Related to this central concern was the significance of allowing sufficient time for professionals at all levels to think, trial, digest, consolidate and constantly review curriculum changes. Most of the heads and teachers had, at the time of the interviews, been going through this process for approximately two to three years and many of the initial problems had been or were on their way to being resolved.
- Several headteachers already had sophisticated and successful systems in place for ensuring that increased creativity and more imaginative ways of engaging children's enjoyment and commitment did not compromise standards, targets for improvement and predicted pupil progress.

The significance of having a financial strategy which ensured that funding was targeted where it was most needed emerged as another important finding which impacted strongly on successful curriculum innovation. One head, for example, was very committed to a curriculum which served local interests and which met children's immediate needs. Her school was located on a busy main street in an urban metropolis. Many of the children cycled around the city on unsafe bicycles because their parents could not afford to buy new ones. She could find no organisation prepared to conduct cycle proficiency courses with faulty bikes. Her resolution to the problem was to buy new cycles for the school so that all children could learn to ride safely in accordance with the Highway Code. In another school the headteacher and ICT co-coordinator were convinced that ICT and the new technologies would become an increasingly important part of the primary school curriculum both in accessing knowledge and transforming learning. Their current system did not have sufficient capacity to allow children to save and preserve their files across the school so new hardware and software was bought which was more efficient and which increased the school's capacity to make better use of global learning platforms. This investment dramatically improved the way in which pupils could use ICT to learn across the curriculum and network with schools in Britain and in other countries.

The processes and strategies outlined above have highlighted the importance of a gradualist approach to change in a supportive and positive learning environment. Such change needs to be embedded in school development plans and aligned with the school's particular contextual circumstances. It requires a clear and understood process of change which begins with small, localised experimentation gradually leading to greater school involvement to the point where it becomes part of a new, whole school endeavour. Headteachers need to have a clearly worked out strategy for change from its inception through to implementation and evaluation. It matters that change is led by middle leaders who not only offer exemplary and inspirational models but who have the capacity and ability to drive change throughout the school. The strategic appointment of leaders at this level, whose concern is with the whole curriculum rather than separate subjects, appears from the findings, to be central to successful curriculum innovation.

6.4.5 Distinguishing features of high-quality leadership

The high calibre of the headteachers and the evident respect with which they were regarded by other members of staff, was a striking feature of the findings. The interview data suggests strongly that these were, in every sense, outstanding school leaders. Three of them had brought their schools out of 'special measures' or 'satisfactory' Ofsted grades to a Grade 1 Outstanding or Grade 2 Good judgement. The other heads had all been responsible for achieving grades of either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in their schools.

Among the many distinguishing features of their leadership three stood out as common to them all:

- Absolute clarity of purpose and direction essential. Leaders knew where and how their schools needed to be led in order to improve the educational experience of their pupils without compromising standards of achievement.
- There was an unambiguous view that a key part of a leader's role is to give a strong lead which occasionally meant taking a tough line with teachers who were not fully 'on board' with the school's planned direction. However, there was, in their view, no tension between the demonstration of strong leadership and a strong commitment to consultation and the involvement of all staff, from teacher assistants to the senior leadership team in their plans for curriculum change. Listening to and being sensitive to the varying strengths and weaknesses of their professional colleagues was accorded a very high priority in their concept of leadership. Leadership in these heads went hand in hand with sensitive support, consultation and whole school involvement in innovatory change.
- The absolute centrality of children's needs is paramount. Children's wishes, rights and entitlements should be at the core of all discussions and decisions concerning the curriculum and the quality of learning experience the school provides.

6.4.6 Leadership structures and distributed leadership

Following from this it was no surprise to find that devolved and distributive models of leadership were the preferred option in all schools visited. The headteachers believed firmly that the curriculum innovations which they wanted to put into place would have limited success unless all members of staff were genuinely and actively involved in the change process. In the larger schools, leadership structures were organised in ways which ensured that teams of leaders from senior management downwards constantly fed back and updated each other on staff progress and pupil response to the various curriculum innovations being implemented at the time. In line with one of the key principles of a distributive model of leadership was the importance of feedback channels which went both upwards and downwards so that all school leaders were fully in touch with school and in-class progress. Equally important was the desire on the part of the headteachers to be kept fully informed about staff attitude and mood state when new changes were being implemented. If there were tensions, problematic issues or an impression that staff were feeling overwhelmed by the implications of change, headteachers wanted to know about it and to act upon it at the earliest opportunity in order to ameliorate potential negative impact. In relation to staffing the findings indicate that headteachers had a very clear view about which teachers on their staff were likely to be the most effective leaders of change at senior or middle levels. Linked to this was the importance of a well worked out recruitment policy both in the short and longer term. Indeed one head was described by the senior leadership team as having a vision about staffing which resulted in a close fit between the school's needs at the time with successful appointments. Several interviewees mentioned the need for recruits who would be able to quickly adapt and contribute to the work currently being pursued by the staff team. Being a critical thinker was a highly valued attribute. Star performers who were focused on self promotion were viewed as less valuable in a context where coherent team work was central to successful implementation in curriculum innovation.

6.4.7 Impact on standards and pupil progress

Uppermost in the headteachers' priorities was their wish to keep a sharp eye on the effect that innovations were having upon standards and pupil progress. In the larger schools this meant appointing staff to leadership posts who could cope with the scope and scale of the job they were appointed to. To this end the strategic use of deputy heads and assistant heads in posts of responsibility which were solely focused on the monitoring of standards and assessment was common to all schools of two-form entry or more. Such was the status and importance of these posts that no other, full-time portfolio of responsibility was given to them. These post holders were adept at handling and using complex statistical data bases the results of which were regularly interpreted and shared with staff on a frequent basis. In one school, the assistant head for assessment had begun to teach class teachers how to collect their own data so that they too were involved in quantitative analyses of standards of achievement and progress within their own classes. Previously all the statistical data information was restricted to the senior management team only. There was little evidence in the findings to suggest that heads were driving through curricula change in a spirit of unbridled, progressive zeal. On the contrary, frequent and regular checks and balances on standards and progress were a vital and integral part of their leadership strategies.

The importance of the appointment of curriculum co-ordinators or leaders who possessed the ability to enthuse and motivate both teachers who were keen to make the desired changes as well as those who were unsure and uncertain, has already been discussed in the previous section. In two of the largest schools, middle leaders played a strong role in modelling the kind of planning which ensured subject coverage, appropriateness of content, year group related challenge, a range of pedagogical approaches and clear objectives. As discussed earlier, findings showed a strong preference for a coaching and mentoring methodology. However, where teachers needed more explicit guidance on how to match planning with more creative ways of teaching and learning, year group teachers planned together in their PPA times and a middle or senior leader sat in on these meetings not only to ensure consistency of planning standards but to provide guidance where it was required or deemed to be necessary. Such meetings were also seen by senior leaders as an effective and efficient forum for the passing on of key messages about planning priorities and good practice. For example, Caroline, acting deputy head of Tern Gate School who had recently been seconded from another school, was impressed not only by the use of the middle leadership teams to pass on and share good planning practice but also by the opportunity it afforded for the communication of messages about vision, ethos and the school's targeted priority of the moment:

'You get much stronger communication that way So if you're wearing the literacy 'hat' instead of taking away the literacy planning and looking at children's books in isolation, you can actually share that. We actually do the job through the middle leadership group. So everybody is sharing those key messages which then get filtered down to the year groups and the classes.'

(Caroline, acting deputy head: Tern Gate Primary School. Research interview: 04/05/10)

6.4.8 Implications for small schools

Smaller schools of one-form entry do not have this inbuilt advantage or opportunity so, much of their planning is done in isolation or, in the case of trialling new formats, as a whole school. In these schools the headteacher or deputy bears the main burden for leading changes to planning or monitoring. However, two of the smaller schools were, as part of their medium term leadership strategies, beginning to include plans to work with nearby schools so that opportunities to work with other teachers within the same year group, could occur in the future. A particularly interesting finding was that in the largest school of the sample, same year group teachers regularly met for planning meetings with their federated school. The federated school had suffered a prolonged period of discontinuous leadership with negative consequences for staff development. Planning meetings across two schools led by middle leaders had the benefit of providing support for a struggling school, sharing ideas and good practice as well as creating another forum for the dissemination of the key messages already referred discussed.

6.4.9 Pupil voice

However, whatever the size or social context of the school what mattered above all to headteachers interviewed, was the centrality of children's needs and wishes in discussions about the kind of curriculum they wanted for their school. In most schools, this commitment went far beyond the occasional reference to the importance of pupil voice to a genuine enfranchisement of children in the process of decision making about curriculum change. An impressive example of this was found at Swift Avenue Junior School where the School Council, including a pupil curriculum group, were invited to join the staff on an 'Away Day' with the specific purpose of designing a new curriculum:

'...I thought well actually we're looking as a school to change the curriculum. Let's have a look, ... let's involve the children. So we spent a whole day with the children, the School Council, actually looking at the curriculum, how they thought it worked for them, what sort of things they would like to see if we let them have a new curriculum, and in which ways did they think learned best. What were the best learning situations for them?'

(Bridget, headteacher: Swift Avenue Junior School. Research interview: 28.04/10)

The children gave poster and Power Point presentations of their preferred curriculum, what they did not like at the time and what they would like in the future. The ideas they put forward were taken seriously by the leadership team and incorporated into the school's development plan for action.

The distributed leadership model which was so apparent in these findings was not mere rhetoric but acted upon in ways which pervaded the entire culture and ethos of the school. The headteachers' concern to design new forms of curricula which aligned closely with the communities and world, in which children lived, including the things that worried them as well as those they cared about and enjoyed, was highly valued by *all* staff. One Year 6 class teacher, who was in her second year of teaching, was deeply appreciative of her headteacher's commitment to a values led curriculum (see vignette 5, appendix 2) which placed a strong emphasis on inclusion and equality. Several of her pupils had been the victims of homophobic bullying and she felt able to deal with the matter in a serious, forthright manner with her class:

'We've been doing a lot of work as a school about our equalities policies this year so I was given a clear mandate from the leadership in terms of using that in our ..., not only as a specific subject to be tackled, but actually threading those equality ideas through in a lot of the work we do. And I feel like it's very important for the person delivering that message, or trying to facilitate that conversation, not to be tentative, because otherwise that makes other people, the kids feel nervous about it.... That's why I went into teaching, that's the exciting thing, you get to have conversations and like open minds and you know, that's why I'm here. So to be able to give, to be given the thumbs up and like go for it, this is what we want, it's just, it's been really exciting.'

(Rachel, Year 6 class teacher, Heronsgate Primary School. Research interview: 06/05/10)

Ensuring that all staff were proactively involved in curriculum change through devolved models of leadership was a clear finding in the research and largely replicates the findings in the Phase 1 schools. Leadership structures and strategies which integrated innovation with the safeguarding of standards of achievement and pupil progress was a major priority for headteachers both of large and smaller schools. Whatever the size of the school or scale of its contextual problems, a frequently expressed core belief was that children should be a valued part of the process of changes. Linked to this central principle was the desire to provide a curriculum which challenged and enriched children's experience at school and which made strong connections with their lives beyond school.

6.5 What are the main characteristics of best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation in primary schools?

The energy and enthusiasm with which heads and teachers spoke of the various forms of curriculum innovation that had been trialled and implemented in their schools was observed in all the schools visited. The pride and sense of immense satisfaction with which staff, from the newest teacher recruit to the most experienced headteacher, spoke about the significant gains pupils had made in achievement, engagement and high quality learning cannot be underestimated. Indeed it was a marked and prominent feature of the findings in the Phase 2 schools. The positive effects of more creative and flexible approaches to teaching the curriculum were diverse including for example, a strong impact on pupil learning, the quality of the school learning environment and social and moral development. Important to note too, was that however imaginative and innovative the changes were, literacy and mathematics and basic skills in the core curriculum, continued to be a major priority for all the schools visited.

In line with the previous discussion, the findings arising from this research question will be reported under three main areas or themes all of which relate to the characteristics of best practice in the leadership in curriculum innovation:

1. The impact on children's learning and the school learning environment
2. The impact of curriculum innovation on children's social, emotional and moral development
3. The characteristics of best practice in leadership

These areas closely interrelate and interconnect with each other so whilst their 'separation' is useful for textual organisation and narrative cohesion, they are, to some extent arbitrary divisions. However, they serve to highlight some important implications of effectively led curriculum change.

6.5.1 Children's learning

When pupils were given the opportunity to follow a particular line of enquiry within a focussed topic or theme, all the interviewees reported a distinct increase in levels of confidence when children talked about what they had learned. This was particularly evident in the presentations which children were encouraged to give to parents, members of the local community and at school assemblies. However, these presentations were not solely limited to verbal accounts of showing and telling, albeit that they were generally well informed and articulate. A wide range of types and modes of presenting learning was used which included, poster displays, Power Point presentations, short film and video clips and interactive displays used to demonstrate work in progress. This variety of forms used by pupils to display knowledge and understanding indicates the regular use of multimedia, visual and art based pedagogies in the classroom, another important finding in the interview data.

Children responded enthusiastically to enquiry based approaches to learning especially when they were given greater responsibility and a degree of choice about how they organised and recorded it. These points are very well exemplified by a child led action research project at Swift Avenue junior School. When children in the school's Curriculum Group were asked what the best and worst learning situations were for them they reported that practical work of all kinds, especially when it was outside the classroom, was their preferred way of learning. What they liked least was not being allowed to finish work before having to move onto another task. Children found this especially frustrating and demotivating. As a result of this finding, a decision was taken by the senior management team to conduct a piece of action research with their Year 6 pupils. Its purpose was to see whether children learned more and derived greater enjoyment from a local history project in which they were given the opportunity to work outside the classroom. The key enquiry question was to find out what life was like in their immediate community 80 years ago and how it differed from the present. This involved the children in visits to local residential centres where they interviewed the residents, most of whom were in their seventies and eighties. The work began by giving children ample opportunity to practise interviewing each other using a range of interview techniques. During the course of the interviews residents produced photographs and artefacts dating from the 1920s and talked to the children about what their school was like at the time and the kinds of lives they led when they were children. The children's response to work of this kind was entirely positive with respect to enjoyment and the learning of history through live interviews. The following extract illustrates these points clearly:

'So we gauged the children's opinion at the beginning of it and at the end, and overwhelmingly they said they'd enjoyed learning that way much more, and they felt they'd learnt much more about their past from actually talking to people, and that that they were able to retain a lot more of the information that they'd found. ... I think the outcome was far better than we'd ever expected.'
(Chris, deputy head: Swift Avenue Junior School. Research interview: 28/04/10)

At the end of the project Year 6 pupils were invited to tea with the head and senior leadership team in order to recount their 'learning journeys' (a term chosen by the school to encourage children to think about all they had learned across curriculum subjects). What emerged during these tea party discussions was not only the palpable enthusiasm demonstrated by pupils and teachers but evidence of much deeper levels of understanding which impacted positively on raised SATs performance and levels of achievement in reading and writing later that year. Children had particularly appreciated having whole afternoons to work on their project rather than regular, shorter periods of time. Furthermore, in order to maximise the amount of time available to them, children even suggested that they abandoned their usual afternoon, playtime break.

On the basis of this evidence, the school designed a year plan of themed projects for all the year groups which began rather than finished with visits outside the classroom. The importance of this initial 'hook' to draw the children into the project and harness their interest right from the start, became the model used for all the projects as they were gradually rolled out to other year groups.

This action research enquiry has been reported in some detail because it reveals and exemplifies a number of points about the characteristics of best practice. Pupils' views and opinions were taken seriously, valued and given status through action. In this school, the views of children provided the key impetus for changes to the curriculum thus ensuring a close fit with subsequent innovations and their wishes and interests. This had come about as a result of the strong belief of the headteacher that this was the 'right' way to kick start change. Wider school implementation did not occur until an enquiry based history project had been trialled through an action research study. Sound evidence of its success in ways already outlined, was deemed to be necessary before incorporating theme based 'learning journeys' into the School Development Plan. It is suggested from this that leaders need to engage in very thorough groundwork before making sweeping changes throughout the school. It might also be inferred that a certain amount of courage and professional conviction on the part of leaders is also necessary at the early stages of curriculum innovation.

There were a number of other significant gains in children's learning reported by interviewees. When children were given blocks of time like whole days or entire weeks to work on a given theme or question, they were able to make links in their understanding of an idea like poverty, or the Victorian school for example, across curriculum subjects. Where they had been encouraged to explain the process of their thinking in mathematics, for example, they were eventually able to transfer this ability to other areas of the curriculum. For example, Barbara, at Swallowfield Primary School, had worked hard with her Year 4 pupils to encourage them to justify their answer to a mathematics question by beginning with the phrase, 'I think this and I know that because ...' This teacher had begun the process of innovation at her school by looking at ways of enriching and enlivening mathematical development and she noticed, as did other teachers, that children began to apply these thinking skills beyond mathematics to literacy and other curriculum areas.

A prominent finding was the emphasis which schools were placing on high quality speaking and listening activities involving drama, hot seating, questioning and explaining. Pupil talk in the form of exploring ideas and giving succinct summaries of their learning were frequently seen in the lessons observed across the schools. In one school Year 6 pupils were given the problem of making a piece of Ancient Greek armour from 6 pieces of sugar paper. They were not allowed to draw or cut; they could only fold, tear or stick. The results of their efforts had been displayed by the children and each group had to present a three minute talk on the main things they had learned as a result. In all the presentations heard the children kept to the time limit, stuck closely to their brief as well as giving animated, witty and articulate accounts. Overall, the findings showed that teachers perceived speaking and listening across the curriculum as a very powerful tool which enabled children across the ability range to access learning at their respective level of understanding.

It appeared from the findings that the experience of implementing changes in their curricula had opened up a more spacious and imaginative range of pedagogies to teachers. This was particularly noticeable in the way in which ICT was being harnessed and used to transform learning across areas of the curriculum. For example Pauline, of Swallowfield Primary School, had used a combination of ICT, art, literacy and history to increase children's understanding and learning of a Greek myth through a cine literacy project. Using the film technique of story boarding and the construction of figures made from plasticine, a mixed ability group of Year 5 children made their own animations of a Greek myth. Their story board sequences were made into a play script which the children later recorded to accompany their film. According to Pauline, this experience resulted in a positive impact on the writing and reading performance of all children including the least able pupil in the class. This opening up of a wider range of pedagogies also had a marked impact on the school learning environment, the subject of the next section.

6.5.2 The learning environment

A notable finding was that whilst the impact of curriculum innovation had a positive effect on the school environment it also extended *beyond* the school thus widening the concept of the learning environment to include resources and buildings outside school. In the example discussed above for instance, the filming of a Greek myth with Year 5 pupils was greatly enhanced by the availability of the Local Authority's Computer Learning Centre. This resource had software which included movie making and animation programmes not normally available to primary schools. This facility and Pauline's resourcefulness led to the successful completion of children's films and considerably increased their interest in the genre. In another school the city theatre was the starting point or 'hook' for a project on the history of the theatre. This gave children the opportunity to visit the theatre and learn how it worked from the sale of tickets to the mechanics of scene shifting and the making of costumes and props.

6.5.3 The use of ICT as a powerful tool in the learning environment

The sophisticated and imaginative use of ICT as a powerful tool for learning across the curriculum was a further striking feature of the data. The confidence and technical expertise shown by teachers in their use of ICT and multi-media devices had significantly expanded the children's learning environment. The use of digital cameras, podcasts, and camcorders in the schools visited enabled children to increase their understanding of realities beyond school. Many of the schools observed were offering their pupils multi learning environments which were simultaneously, immediate, virtual and global. The following examples serve to illustrate these points. In Swallowfield Primary School, a group of Year 4 children were engaged in a study of rainforests. They made film of their own in the genre of a documentary. They also wrote a television script of an interview with a presenter and a zoologist giving an account of the various animal species which lived in the rainforest. A Year 5 class in the same school had a close relationship with a school in Spain. They set up a video conference between themselves and the pupils in Spain to tell them all about their school, their town and the things they did during their school day. This was later made into a podcast and sent to their link school in Spain. In Ravenscroft Junior School, children were observed using webcams to construct their own animated website based on a chosen story. They were also making their own websites to support a particular curriculum area. In this and other schools heads and teachers were finding that skilled and judicious use of ICT was having such a significant impact on children's learning that they were beginning to embrace a specific ICT pedagogy which could be applied to the whole curriculum. Such was the rich potential of this form of pedagogy that staff at Ravenscroft, took the decision to teach more advanced ICT skills from Year 3 onwards so that pupils could apply them to practical problems earlier than previously. Andy emphasises the importance of using learning materials and resources which resonate meaningfully to the world in which children live. Digital and both portable and static screen displays of text and pictures are very familiar to children who are often sophisticated users of them. He makes the point that if they are not part of children's learning environment then learning at school may appear less relevant and outmoded:

'In the outside world that's what they see all the time. That's what they're used to. If they're coming into school and they haven't got that technology then they switch off. If you do a lesson where you aren't using something on the interactive whiteboard that's visual, you have to go that much further to get their interest.'

(Andy, deputy head: Ravenscroft Junior School. Research interview: 09/03/10).

6.5.4 Widening the curriculum

Whilst the previous points about learning in the extended classroom are clearly significant features of learning environments which serve to enhance and support curriculum innovation, the quality of the immediate environment of the school continues to fulfil an important function. Some of the features of what counts as a school learning environment are classroom and school visual displays, outdoor spaces and the use of staff expertise to widen the school curriculum. Observations in the Phase 2 schools showed prominent use of classroom displays as another way of presenting information many of which were interactive inviting children to touch, look and find answers to questions and problems. These displays were often used as a form of 'teaching wall' and referred to frequently in daily lessons. They were less an aesthetic celebration of children's work and more of a visual teaching tool. Prominent too were pupil led displays where a particular stage of learning in mathematics, science or a problem solving task for instance, was presented for peers to see. Pupils often used these displays to talk about their 'work-in-progress' to teachers and their peers. These pupil displays were frequently used as a means of encouraging higher order forms of speaking, listening and discussion. This finding suggests that displays in the Phase 2 schools were dynamic and fluid and much more concerned with transitions in learning rather than end states. In some respects this form of display closely reflects the ongoing experimental nature of the work with which teachers were involved in implementing changes to the curriculum.

In one or two schools, specific expertise within the school staff, parents and adults in the local community was used to offer areas of learning which were not included in the National Curriculum. Some examples of these were Irish step dancing, Bangla dancing, a keep fit programme, sculpting, ethnic cooking, safe cycling and golf, where facilities allowed it. At Tern Gate School, pupils could choose to follow one of a variety of modules based on similar activities like those already indicated, once a week. These were immensely popular with children and a further example of the school's resolve to widen curriculum provision and to make more use of local talent and expertise.

The use of outdoor spaces to create high quality learning environments was taken very seriously in many of the schools visited. These environments were not only used by children in the Foundation Stage but all year groups. The head of Finch Lane Primary School, for example had invested both money and resources in providing external learning environments which enlivened the teaching of mathematics, geography and science. In Ravenscroft Junior School, a sculptor worked with children for a week on the making of woodland creatures from objects found in the school's grounds. One of them included a 9 foot high mythical beast and another a sinuous, 60 foot snake which wound its way through a grove of laurels and was made from dead bits of wood. Children used this learning environment for drama, imaginative play and stimulus for further development in this particular art form.

These findings show that curricula innovations of the kinds discussed above had, without question, a favourable impact on children's learning and standards of achievement. Innovations which provided opportunities for sustained engagement in art, drama and music, for example, were reported by teachers to have had a marked impact on children's motivation, attitude and commitment to learning. One of the consequences of changes which encouraged interrelated subject learning was the use of a wider range of pedagogies and potential learning sites both within and beyond school.

6.5.5 The impact of curriculum innovation on social, emotional and moral development

Whilst neither this or the previous sections were the intentional foci of the research, the frequency with which heads and teachers commented on positive changes in children's social, emotional and moral development suggested that there might be a relationship between the latter and curriculum innovation. A more detailed analysis of the data showed that an unintended consequence of curriculum change was a demonstrable impact on pupil behaviour, peer relationships, independence of thought and social maturity. It would seem that the pedagogies and processes used for curriculum innovation helped children to feel that they were part of something new, exciting and experimental. Furthermore, their response and reaction to it was being taken very seriously by teachers. Not only were they enjoying learning but they were given greater responsibility, greater choice and a far wider range of learning environments which extended beyond the classroom. Such was their enthusiasm, motivation and high level of interest in both what and how they were learning that not only did their achievement profile improve, so too did their social, emotional and moral development.

These effects were not confined to pupils alone. Teachers and teacher assistants were working together in a joint enterprise which they too were enjoying and benefitting from. The immense care which heads took to ensure that change was conducted in a supportive and collegial context ensured that tensions and points of potential conflict were proactively and sensitively managed. In some of the schools visited, particularly those with pupils who frequently displayed serious behaviour challenges, considerable energy and effort had been devoted to the provision of a school counsellor and trained coaches in order to help teachers deal more effectively with disruptive and problematic children. The belief underpinning this provision was that teachers, who were listened to, valued and positively affirmed by professional colleagues, were more likely to be able to listen and deal effectively with pupils' concerns. The findings suggest strongly that one of the characteristics of best practice in the effective leadership of curriculum innovation is the creation of a learning environment which has a discernible impact on children's social, emotional and moral development as well as educational achievement. Closely linked with this is the priority accorded to the provision of a collegial working environment in which teachers also feel valued, respected and positively supported. Some examples drawn from the interview data serve to illustrate and inform these findings.

In Ravenscroft Junior School, the children were so involved and motivated by the curriculum days and weeks which the school had introduced that the number of bullying incidents in the playground had reduced to the extent that the pupil school council decided that the peer mediation system that had been in place for some years, was no longer needed.

'The school council has decided to discontinue the use of peer mediators for bullying and friendship problems because it was not being used, and the general feeling was we don't need this. So we have seen huge improvements in behaviour.'

(Harry, headteacher: Ravenscroft Junior School. Research interview: 09/03/10)

The school also had a system of playground exclusions whereby children were given yellow and then red cards when their behaviour was deemed to be unacceptable but this too had been abandoned because it was no longer necessary. Instead, the school had introduced rich range of reward systems which had made a significant difference to the positive atmosphere of the school. Harry thought this was entirely due to the mutual respect which now existed between pupils and teachers and his perception that children did not want to step out of line because they so valued the learning experiences the school was now offering them.

The importance paid to children's views through school councils and curriculum groups where children were given responsibility for representing their respective class views, was taken very seriously by the heads and teachers. There was no indication that this was a matter of lip service or a question of being politically correct with respect to the current agenda for giving greater priority to 'pupil voice'. On the contrary, children's views genuinely counted and were acted upon as recounted earlier by pupil involvement in a staff 'away day' at Swift Avenue Junior School. The commitment shown by headteachers to these forms of pupil enfranchisement had, as one head put it, 'empowered children to feel a degree of ownership in the lives of their school and the new directions in which it was moving'.

6.5.6 Extending social experiences

Another consequence of working in more holistic and interrelated curricula was the opportunity it presented for children to work in different social groupings. Sometimes this meant working on one particular project with the whole school so that children could work with others outside their immediate peer group and with teachers they had not encountered before. These new social experiences made demands upon pupils to learn how to deal with and adapt to children who were both older and younger than their usual classmates. For example, in Finch Lane Primary School, Tricia commented on the immense amount of social learning which went on during their school 'theme days' when the older pupils became peer tutors for the younger children:

'We had a maths day, where the older children were, we had different activities around the hall, and older children actually were in charge of each activity, and then they had to instruct the younger children and support them. That was fantastic because we saw teaching skills coming out you know.'

(Tricia, curriculum leader: Finch Lane Primary School. Research interview: 26/04/10)

Not only did this provide opportunities for older pupils to extend their social skills to take on a teaching role and learn how to support a younger pupil, but it also provided a powerful pupil teacher model and one which younger pupils could aspire to become. Similarly, in Wrencroft Primary School, Year 6 pupils suggested that they take responsibility for setting up a series of school study zones to which younger pupils could come to get help during designated times. The computer suite and the library, for example, were organised to provide pupil tuition for younger pupils who wanted to find out more about their particular projects from reference books and the internet. This proved to be extremely popular with younger pupils and was later extended to include help with reading and mathematics. In the same school when children were given group problem solving tasks, they were encouraged to work outside their usual friendship groups choosing instead, pupils with the kinds of skills and qualities (like those good at drawing or organising material, for example), which would best help them resolve their assigned problem.

These illustrations demonstrate that cross curricula approaches to learning open up opportunities for children to work in more complex and demanding social relations which in several instances included working with different teachers, parents other than their own and adults from the local community. Several interviews mentioned the marked increase in levels of confidence and self esteem in pupils who served on school councils. They also reported greater independence in pupils' thinking, evidence of growth in children's ability to show tolerance, understanding and sensitivity when they were working with younger children. This suggests that one of the spin offs in curricula innovation is an acceleration of children's social and emotional growth.

6.5.7 Changing models of teaching

Another consequence of these configurations of working was that the models of teaching where the pace, direction and structure of sessions was led and dominated by the teacher, were far less appropriate in more fluid social interactions where children played a more prominent and decisive role. Indeed, there are indications in the data that in these forms of teaching and learning, the teacher role has shifted from that of teller and controller of knowledge to one of questioning facilitator. An indication of this shift is described by Cathy, headteacher of Wrencroft Primary School. One of her key aims in curriculum change was to provide a more personalised learning environment in which children were encouraged to make their own decisions and become more independent in their thinking. Her staff were being trained in a TASC model of learning (Thinking Actively in the Social Context) and had to complete a reflective audit on how far they encouraged children to become more effective in their thinking and decision making. An unexpected finding was that whilst her staff scored well in most areas, none of them allowed children to generate ideas of their own or make decisions about the next learning step to take.

'We'd become entrenched in being teachers and telling them and giving them the structures, and everybody said those two areas which for me are the areas that absolutely empower the children and excite the children, we weren't doing as effectively as all of the other facets. In this model, it's about facilitating and it's about effective questioning, it's about knowing where the children are and what are the right questions to ask at the beginning of the next lesson in order to move them forward with their own plan which are immense skills.'

(Cathy, headteacher: Wrencroft Primary School. Research interview: 07/05/10)

Cathy and one or two other headteachers who had made similar observations, commented that the National Strategies and the Ofsted frameworks for inspection had promoted a view of teacher behaviour in which they were the controllers of space, time and knowledge whilst pupils reacted and responded to their directions with little scope for manoeuvre. There were clear indications in the findings that teachers were keen to move away from the latter model to one which was closer to the former.

6.5.8 Inclusion and a values-led curriculum

A significant feature of best practice was the status and value given to the place of inclusion in all aspects of school life including the curriculum. In schools large enough to be able to appoint assistant heads as well as deputy heads, the responsibility for inclusion was either the entire brief for a senior leader or part of a portfolio of responsibilities. One of the features of best practice in the research schools was the extent to which it was embedded and interwoven into the culture of the school as a whole. A striking example of this was found in Heronsgate Primary School where the entire curriculum was founded on the principles of inclusion, equality and social justice. Gang crime and inter-racial conflict was a part of the pupils' everyday reality. Respect and concern for racial groups other than their own was low and conflicts between parents and between pupils in the playground and in the school frequently erupted causing considerable behaviour management problems for the staff. The imperative for Beatrice, the headteacher, was to design a curriculum which would help children to develop greater levels of tolerance and respect for others. She was also committed to a form of curriculum renewal in which the social, moral and emotional development of all pupils permeated learning in the widest sense. Central to this was her determination to offer the kind of knowledge and understandings which would help pupils make sense of their environment both in the past and the present. In her view, the curriculum most needed by the children was one which was immediately relevant to their lives and those of their families. Her vision for the school was to provide a values-led curriculum in which the setting, ranking or grouping of children according to ability or performance had no place. Because of the low

self-esteem of many of the pupils and the difficulties faced daily by staff as a result of frequent aggressive outbursts from both children and parents, the emotional and social well being of pupils and staff was a fundamental moral concern in her leadership of the school.

The effect of the head's vision and values on the classroom practice of a recently qualified Year 6 teacher in her second year of teaching powerfully illustrates these points. She also indicates the presence of a moral dimension to her role which informs her practice:

Rachel: You know having parents at home that can't get jobs, you know being poor, actually that's massively political and it's a reality you know and you can't ignore it because poverty is a huge part of their experience. So I'm not talking about party politics at all, I'm talking about I guess in a way, a sense of democracy in the fact that we value these experiences as life is so political and these kids are living it. And for me it feels like a responsibility to be able to, for critical consciousness I guess, for children to be able to recognise that they are, that they do have some empowerment, but also that stuff is done to them and that they are kind of citizens in this society and there's an awful lot going on that isn't explained to them but they are kind of victims in many ways. It's actually about saying, well what do you think about that? How does that affect you? And giving a confidence in that the children feel they're able to express their views.

Researcher: And have you found that the children are able to come out and say what's worrying them in the classroom?

Rachel: Yeah, and it's difficult to stop them! I mean it's ... we do an awful lot of work here about communication, so I mean there aren't many schools that I've seen where even in Year 6 you'd have a carpet space, and ours is for class discussion and that's where we do our talking, and we do a lot of talking. So the conversations we have are sometimes quite channelled, sometimes very free and open. We also have a circle time each week and that's a very rich, alive space for conversations about anything that's going on in the kids' lives.

(Rachel, Year 6 class teacher: Heronsgate Primary School. Research interview: 06/05/10)

This extract has been reported in detail because it shows how far Rachel has gone in her efforts to connect with the children's experience in ways which not only value their reality but give some constructive directions about how they might better understand and respond to it.

An integral part of this value driven curriculum is the ongoing emotional and social support provided for staff which includes a school counsellor and coaching experts. The rationale for this professional support is that if teachers are not in a sufficiently robust emotional state themselves, they will not be able to support emotionally fragile children who live in precarious social environments. Sam, the deputy head describes how important this is to the well being of the school's staff:

'We've done a lot of work around emotional intelligence. And this has helped us support the adults who can then support the children. So we're very explicit about that. We've had a lot of conferences with staff. We've also worked with a coach and a management consultant so all the management team get half termly coaching sessions, and that's another opportunity for them to reflect on where they are and have some guidance in moving forward ...These sessions proved a kind of vehicle for that kind of conversation like what do you need in order to be able to move forward? What is it that you need within yourself? What is it that we can provide? What do we need to change? And I think, for me, I've very much been on a journey of thinking about how I can best enable other people, and I feel very passionately about that.'

(Sam, deputy head: Heronsgate Primary School. Research interview: 06/05/10)

Leaders in this school have designed a curriculum which is informed by a set of values and beliefs which has prioritised children's social and emotional needs. The social and cultural context in which pupils live has a long history of deprivation, poverty and fluctuating social groupings. Inter-racial conflicts and gang crime is a part of their daily lives and children often came to school with highly charged emotions as a result of incidents which may have occurred the night before. In this particular community context, the moral imperative for the head was to provide a curriculum which enabled children to develop and mature socially and emotionally. A central aim of the curriculum was to provide a thematic approach to learning based on topics which were relevant to their lives and the community in which they lived. Whether it was science, mathematics or history the principles of inclusion, equality and justice permeated both the content and pedagogy of the curriculum (see vignette 5, appendix 3). Equally important to the head was the maintenance of an environment which supported and valued children and staff with the help of coaching and counselling models. Active listening and active questioning through a series of what the head called, 'constant, questioning conversations' were used regularly to help children make progress as well as professionally develop the staff. Of crucial importance in this values-led curriculum was that all teachers shared its vision and beliefs. When Sam, the deputy head was asked what she did as a senior leader to ensure that these values were sustained throughout the school, she responded:

'I think it's walking the talk. I think that's absolutely key that I, you know I live it. I don't just say it. I live it, but also keeping it really alive. It's almost in every conversation, in every conversation that I have with a child or an adult, so it's very much seen. So I think that's been the key.'

The exemplary modelling of affirmation and support provided by school leaders in this school was seen as an effective way of ensuring that the values of the curriculum were 'kept alive' and at the forefront of daily class room practice. This can be seen as a further example of best practice in the leadership of curriculum change.

6.6 To what extent is there a link between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness and improvement?

Some heads were readily able to identify links with curriculum innovation and school improvement. Others found it harder to point to what they referred to as 'hard' evidence because of an under achieving Year 6 group for example, or because their school generally fell below national expectations in levels of achievement and SATs results. Hard evidence in this context was interpreted as raised levels of achievements in summative test results, raised levels of achievement as a result of teacher assessment and the outcome of recent Ofsted inspections. Whilst this kind of evidence is valid and useful data from which to make a judgement about the effects of curriculum innovation, there were other kinds of evidence which the investigation was keen to uncover. These included, for example, the observable but less easy to quantify, effects on children's behaviour, social relationships, attitude, motivation and levels of involvement in school learning. Equally important was the impact of curriculum innovation on teacher performance, teacher effectiveness, teacher attitudes and levels of responsiveness to new ways of learning.

A common reaction to this question was that because children had generally been enthusiastic and far more engaged with learning as a result of more flexible and creative approaches to the curriculum, it followed *ipso facto* that there was a positive relationship between curriculum innovation and school improvement. There is some credence and a common sense validity in this response because if children are enjoying what they are learning, they are likely to be more motivated and committed to seeing their work through to completion. Motivated and engaged pupils are less likely to be disruptive in the classroom and are keener to put their best efforts into work which makes sense to them and which aligns with their interests. Indeed, without exception, *all* interviewees responded favourably on most of the above points, particularly with respect to behaviour, school attendance and greater levels of pupil engagement. Not only was there a marked improvement in classroom behaviour but bullying and racist incidents in the playground had also noticeably declined. Parents also frequently commented on children's improved behaviour since the curriculum changes. This is an important finding which would be worth investigating further given the immense problems large numbers of disruptive pupils can cause for the well being of others who share the same classroom.

Teachers too had found the process of freeing up the curriculum in order to incorporate more creative and theme-based approaches to learning, immensely rewarding and satisfying. Many had struggled with the planning and tracking of progress at the beginning of the change process, but at the time of the research interviews, most were able to report that they had made progress on the development of workable systems of assessment or were on the way to doing so.

Heads who had already developed efficient and proactive assessment and monitoring systems were unequivocal in their view that there were strong links between curriculum innovation and school improvement. This was due in part to the fact that children were now receiving rich learning experiences which were exciting and different and partly because their teachers were energised and enthusiastic about comparatively ways of teaching which they had helped to design and plan. There was a sense in the interviewees' responses that whilst at the start of the change process they had felt uncertain and insecure about moving away from prescription and highly structured programmes of learning, they were now beginning to reap the rewards of their efforts and time spent on planning themes and topics which were relevant to children's interests.

6.6.1 Evidence of school improvement

In three schools where staff had either been piloting curriculum approaches which drew upon the recommendations of the Rose Review, or more creative curricula of their own design, there was sufficient 'hard' data to be able to report that curriculum innovation had, without question, led to school improvement. In Swift Avenue Junior School, for example, where a new curriculum had been implemented after a school curriculum action research project, 50 per cent of Year 6 pupils achieved Level 5 in English and mathematics having been below national averages for this level of attainment before innovation took place. At Tern Street Primary School, low achieving pupils were now beginning to reach national expectations at Key Stages 1 and 2 as a result of implementing the six areas of learning approach advocated by the proposed new primary curriculum. The school had been in 'special measures' when the current head took up appointment and had recently been judged as 'Good with outstanding features' by Ofsted. At Ravenscroft Junior School, the richness and high quality of work initiated by their new creative curriculum was judged by Ofsted to be outstanding. In the previous inspection the school had received a satisfactory judgement. According to the head and deputy head, it was the creative and imaginative work achieved by pupils in art, music and ICT which had convinced the inspectors that their school was worthy of a Grade 1 judgement. Innovation had also significantly enhanced the children's achievements in mathematics and English.

6.6.2 What counts as improvement?

What was of central importance to these headteachers was that higher standards of achievement *and* increased enjoyment and motivation on the part of pupils were required of successful curriculum innovation projects. For Laura, head of Tern Gate Primary School, enjoyment and enthusiasm were desirable but not in themselves sufficient to bring about school improvement. Improvement was contingent upon effective, ongoing and proactive monitoring. It also required a detailed knowledge of children's learning needs and high expectations of their capabilities. Important too, were the provision of CPD programmes which developed teachers' subject knowledge because in her view, a thematic curriculum required a firm knowledge base of a wide range of subject disciplines which included ICT and a developing knowledge of the new technologies and their relevance to a thematic curriculum. However, the headteacher of Wrencroft Primary School was less convinced about the need to relentlessly pursue a standards agenda. Her school had recently achieved a Grade 1 Outstanding from Ofsted for the second time within her headship and most pupils in Year 6 were working well above national expectations. She believed strongly that it was not in her pupils' interests to spend their final primary year aspiring to Level 6 and 7 work. Neither did she accept the view that 'SATs results were a true indicator of an effective school'. What mattered to her was that pupils left her school having learned to think things through for themselves, meet challenges as a team player and know how to be a lifelong learner. For Cathy, the qualitative evidence of improvement was as important as quantitative data:

'We want to broaden their experiences and we want to give them a range of experiences which they can use and apply to learning across the curriculum and we want to give them a chance to be creative in doing that, not to just tick the next box.'

(Cathy, headteacher, Wrencroft C of E Primary School: research interview: 07/05/10)

There were two heads of small, rural schools both of whom had recently achieved an Outstanding grade from Ofsted who felt that improvement in standards of achievement was problematic and difficult to achieve when 100 per cent of their pupils were reaching national expectations and beyond. Their priorities for school improvement were therefore focussed on the quality of children's learning and advancing their intellectual and social development. Wendy, headteacher of Finch Lane Primary School felt that their newly designed creative curriculum was helping to achieve this through a 'virtuous circle of high expectations' where children *want* to do well especially in areas of learning which were relatively new to their school experiences like writing and scripting their own school musical where children helped to write both the music and the lyrics.

All interviewees commented on the marked improvement in the quality of children's work particularly in their writing skills where pupils were now writing longer and more informed pieces of work as well as making much more varied and accurate use of conceptual language. Chris, the deputy head of Swift Avenue Junior School, remarked on the degree of pride which children now showed in their 'learning journey' books. Previously, children had written their work on loose file paper which was then placed in ring binders where it frequently tended to get lost or creased and torn. Part of his school's innovations included giving children higher quality materials to work with including the provision of large, hard backed writing books which were visually attractive. The children were immensely proud of these, loved working in them and particularly liked the fact that they could look back over work done previously and observe their own improvements and achievements. Chris was in no doubt that this provision had resulted in a higher quality work from almost all pupils which had also impressed their parents.

Common to all schools was clear evidence that most children were making progress across the ability range. Teachers had also noted increased fluency and confidence in children's spoken language. Because of their interest and commitment to the work they were now doing, many children had improved dramatically in their ability to articulate and explain what they had learned. Indeed, over a period of two years or so, some children had acquired very sophisticated skills in their oral presentations which were rich in knowledge and conceptual understanding. A very positive impact had also been observed in children with special educational needs who were now able to access a theme based curriculum at their level. Most schools reported that there had also been a positive impact on teacher learning which included increased confidence and competences in their thinking outside subject boxes; a developing ability to plan a theme based curriculum and more effective use of their own specialist interests and expertise.

6.6.3 Difficulties and challenges

However, two interviewees commented on the difficulties curriculum innovation had presented for their schools. In one the school was at a much earlier point in its curriculum innovation, partly because of a major new school building project and partly because some of the school governors were strongly opposed to any form of curriculum change which they thought might negatively affect standards. The school also had a particularly underachieving Year 6 cohort at the time of the research interview. These combined factors had clearly presented some very demanding challenges for the headteacher and her staff. Nonetheless, clear progress had been made at the lower end of the school with a more theme based curriculum approach which both pupils and teachers were enjoying. The problem for her was reconciling the need to make progress with a more flexible curriculum whilst also trying to ensure an upward profile of pupil achievement in levels of attainment and SATs results.

These twin pressures presented real difficulties for the head of the school despite being strongly committed to a new curriculum based on the recommendations of the Rose Review. In this case the links between curriculum innovation and school improvement are going to take time to emerge and it is suggested that this is likely to be a realistic scenario for many schools which are at the beginnings of curriculum change.

In another school, a newly qualified teacher, who had received no training in the planning and assessment of cross-curricula work, commented on the immense challenges which faced her when trying to implement a creative curriculum. These were exacerbated by the considerable social and cultural complexities presented by a transient and diverse community population of ethnic groups, many of whom were materially disadvantaged. In the following extract Rachel is discussing the difficulties of meeting the national expectations demanded by Ofsted at the same time as introducing a more cross-curricula, curriculum:

'... and I think to do that effectively under a creative curriculum, in my opinion is harder, because I think you have to be an incredi ..., and I'm not saying I'm there yet at all, but I aspire to be. I think you have to be incredibly skilled and also it's a much more challenging job. It's much more interesting but it's much more challenging to teach a creative curriculum well. You can do the bog standard, tick the boxes, skills teaching very easily, you know, and that's what people do in preparation for SATs and it's not difficult - but to actually have the confidence but also the competence to teach the creative curriculum well, and cover everything that children need in that early stage of their education, I do think is so important, but also a big challenge.'

(Rachel, Year 6 class teacher, Heronsgate Primary School: research interview: 06/05/10)

Rachel articulates very clearly the problems faced by teachers when trying to implement a creative curriculum in the context of an extraordinarily challenging pupil intake whilst at the same time trying to improve standards of achievement. These last two 'case' illustrations have been presented here to emphasise that whilst some schools are able to report a steep upward curve of improvements across a wide and impressive range of indicators, others find curriculum innovation immensely problematic, however committed they are to putting it in place.

6.7 How can innovation be encouraged and developed in challenging circumstances?

The response to this question was largely based on the interviewees' experience of curriculum innovation in their respective schools, some of whom had successfully implemented change in a diverse and complex range of challenging circumstances. Since the responses mostly consisted of advisory recommendations they are presented without discussion and in summary form in Figure 1 over the page:

Figure 1 - Encouraging innovation in challenging circumstances

Starting out

- At an early whole staff meeting note where the good practice is and hold onto it.
- Start with a clear vision of where you want to go and how you want to get there.
- Start small and build slowly, rolling change out with one Year group or class at a time.
- Start things off with a staff 'Away Day' focussed on curriculum development.
- Plan systems of collegial support in advance of the change process.

Establish an ethos for change

- Encourage a 'can do' ethos and experiment with new ideas in an atmosphere of support.
- Aim to get teachers excited about teaching again.
- Trial assessment, recording and planning systems. Develop an ethos where it is 'safe' to make mistakes.

Share innovatory practice and work together

- Encourage teachers to work together with a 'critical friend' in the early stages of change
- Plan one unit of work with the whole staff with a chosen Year group. Note and record what worked well and what did not. Evaluate as a staff and share the successes. Move on to another Year group utilising and building on your experience with the previous Year group. Evaluate and review.
- Share practice in small teams. Use more experienced and confident staff to model new curricula approaches via a series of classroom observations.

Involve the children

- Involve the children so that curriculum change includes their ideas. Listen carefully to what children say about their preferred ways of learning. What works for them? What does not work?
- Use children as researchers in their own work using the model advocated by Swift Avenue Junior School.
- Give children greater ownership of and responsibility for their learning.

Involve the parents and the local community

- Involve the parents and the local community at appropriate points of curriculum development.

Once the process of development and change is underway

- Discover where good practice in curriculum innovation already exists and organise a series of planned visits for your staff. Where possible organise visits so that they can be undertaken in pairs or small groups with the intention of sharing experiences with the whole staff.
- Give teachers opportunities to try out their own ideas.
- Consider whether your existing leadership structures will enable you to sustain new curriculum initiatives.
- Bring ICT to the forefront of change plans. Identify where skills development is needed and be prepared to resource it adequately.
- Target finance where it is needed in order to accelerate innovation.
- Hold onto core skills work particularly in mathematics and English.
- Cut down the content and make the learning local to the children.
- As confidence and success grows encourage teachers to move away from prescriptive schemes of work to ones they have developed themselves.
- Bear in mind that change takes time to bed down. Avoid rushing change through. Slow things down or temporarily halt change if staff become over whelmed.

Evaluate progress

- Evaluate progress, strengths and weaknesses at each stage of the change process.

Establish links with strong leaders and schools which have experienced successful curriculum innovation

- Pair up with a more experienced school and work with them throughout the change process.
- Smaller schools may find it helpful to pair up with another similar sized school so that the process of curriculum innovation can be worked through and experienced together.
- Identify local schools which are 'ahead of the game' in curriculum innovation and who are capable of supporting and guiding others who are at an early point in their development or who may be struggling.
- Consider using strong leaders with proven experience in curriculum innovation to help guide you and your staff especially with respect to the stages in the process you need to work through.
- Where a federated partnership is already in existence, the partnership schools could work together on a chosen model for curriculum innovation.

6.8 To what extent are primary schools ready to implement the curriculum innovation that will be necessary at a time of strategic review of priorities in education?

For most of the schools visited in the Phase 2 research investigation they had already implemented varying forms of curriculum innovation which included the model recommended by the Rose Review. Indeed some schools were in their second and third years of implementation. Schools which were at earlier points in their new curricula developments were confidently enthusiastic about their readiness to incorporate a new curriculum model within the near future. In fact, heads and teachers were so convinced of the value of their work and its evident benefits to pupils' learning and standards of

achievement that they were determined to continue building on the successes they had worked so hard to achieve.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Curriculum innovation and leadership priorities

The change in national administration and the decision not to implement the proposed new primary curriculum have created a period of uncertainty for primary schools in England. This is nowhere more evident than in relation to the curriculum. This study has revealed that leading curriculum innovation is a challenging and complex task but it is one that is welcomed by headteachers, all of whom view the leadership of learning as central to their role. Undoubtedly, the maintenance of a core curriculum and rising standards in literacy and mathematics continues to be perceived by headteachers as a core part of their leadership role regardless of the type, form or model of curriculum innovation chosen for implementation.

In order for effective curriculum innovation to occur it is clear that an ethos for change needs to be created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching. Moreover, curriculum change needs to take full account and have a good fit with the school's particular contextual needs and circumstances. In the rest of this section we explore these issues in more detail and go on to present a model of innovation.

7.2 The importance of involving all staff in change

A key leadership skill in curriculum innovation is the judicious and strategic use of all staff in a joint endeavour directed towards the implementation of any revised curriculum. It is suggested that when all members of staff feel involved in a collective enterprise, curriculum innovation is more likely to serve the needs and interests of children and those of the wider, school community. Correlatively, a clear steer is required if the important work schools have carried out with respect to planning, tracking and monitoring progress, is not to be lost. Teachers in the study valued explicit guidance in constructing new formats which captured cross-curricular approaches to learning as well as the skills and knowledge to be covered in specific subject areas. The opportunity to trial and review planning and recording formats was also seen as central to this process of change.

7.3 Liaison between phases and between schools

A particularly interesting finding is that the use of the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning throughout the school was viewed as having an important and significant role to play in helping schools move towards the kind of curriculum change recommended in the Rose Review. Thus, working across phases within the school is helpful in creating the ethos noted earlier. Equally, working in collaboration with other schools, in order to share good practice in curriculum innovation, is seen as an important means of enhancing curriculum innovation. Visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools, which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation, seem to offer a powerful set of tools that will assist in the achievement of curriculum change and improvement.

In smaller, one-form entry schools where there is less opportunity to plan within year groups or to share good practice and successful ideas, heads were beginning to establish paired partnerships with other, similar sized schools so they could plan and follow through similar themes and topics together.

7.4 Professional development and support

Schools need to be provided with advice on strategies that assist in acknowledging and recognising areas of the curriculum which need strengthening. Engaging the expertise of others in classroom workshops and whole school INSET programmes is also seen as being important. Indeed, a culture of adult training needs to be built into headteachers' vision for school staff. Regular high quality continuing professional development is provided for all staff including teacher assistants (TA). The involvement of the latter is particularly important in schools where TAs are used increasingly to assess and monitor children with special educational needs. In some of the larger schools, especially those with a complex range of social challenges, TAs outnumber the staff. So their involvement in the school's CPD programme is likely to have a number of positive outcomes both for them, teacher colleagues and pupils. In one school, the head was keen for the school to provide CPD sessions of a consistently high standard whether they were delivered in house or by external speakers. As a way of ensuring quality, all sessions were evaluated and recorded in staff learning logs. These served as useful records and evidence of professional development. In some cases, CPD was part of a responsibility brief for either assistant heads or deputy heads, thus underlining its significance in the school's ongoing development. It requires a clear steer by the headteacher and CPD programmes are identified in advance in the School Development Plan.

Throughout the process of curriculum innovation effective leaders ensure that struggling staff are supported sensitively. Guidance and support is more effective when it is not ad hoc but structured into programmes of training and development. In the larger schools, support for newly qualified and less experienced teachers was part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders. In one school, the well being of both pupils and staff was an active and integral part of a values led curriculum. In another, curriculum leaders set up regular clinics whereby staff could come and discuss ongoing problems and queries during the innovatory stage. This was highly valued by teachers and is cited here as an example of particularly effective and workable leadership support. Middle leaders, particularly where they have responsibility for the whole curriculum rather than a specific subject or group of subjects, are given status and value by the head. This is reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings.

7.5 Assessment and monitoring

Effective curriculum innovation is founded on robust systems of assessment and monitoring which are capable of tracking progress across thematic as well as subject- based curricula. Such systems should be proactive in identifying failing and vulnerable children, as well as giving leaders and teachers a detailed understanding of what they need to do at the end of each Key Stage in order ensure progress. Well developed assessment systems should also provide accessible and user-friendly data to help teachers advance within-year progress. Curricula themes or projects should identify a clear progression of skills understanding and knowledge which is capable of being tracked and recorded. Regular meetings to discuss and evaluate children's work, as well as check on progress and quality, need to involve teachers and all levels of leadership in order to ensure the widest constituency of knowledge on standards, assessment and monitoring.

7.6 Understanding context and leading change

It is clear that the actions and behaviours of leaders positively impact upon learning in the classroom. Effectively led curriculum innovation improves standards of achievement and increases children's enjoyment and engagement in learning. Thus, successful innovations are more likely to be sustained if leaders ensure that research into a range of possible curricula models is carried out before changes are trialled and implemented. For instance, best practice in one school involved an action research project on theme-based learning with its Year 6 pupils. Curricula change was not implemented until its leadership team had evaluated the outcomes of the project and satisfied themselves that the results were favourable for both pupils and teachers.

Curriculum innovation has a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan. The steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation need to be clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned. Within this process, regular points for ongoing evaluation, review and modifications in the light of experience, are clearly identified and acted upon. Curriculum innovation is also founded upon a detailed knowledge of the school, its parents, community, history and social context. It takes careful account of the capabilities, needs and interests of its pupils as well as the strengths and expertise of its staff. It builds on the successful work which the school has undertaken so far, in ways which facilitate change as well as ensure continuity and curriculum coherence.

Innovation is more likely to become part of the school's ethos and culture when it is built into its leadership structures, professional development, whole school planning and workable assessment and monitoring systems. In the best practices of leadership, innovation had been fully integrated into every part of the school's organisation from the start.

7.7 Making the curriculum work for children

In the best examples of good practice, children were an essential part of the process with respect to decision making and involvement in the early stages of innovation. Heads and school leaders were united in their view that to fail to canvas the opinion of children and to listen seriously to what they were saying would be missing an important opportunity and might risk the success of the innovation project.

Best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation ensures that the process of innovation is seen by staff as an opportunity to do things differently, to think laterally and creatively. In one example teachers were asked to consider whether they were using teaching time in the most effective way. One outcome of this was the use of blocks of time like whole days, weeks or half days rather than regular short periods of time. This gave children the chance to work at a more intensive and sustained pace and increased the likelihood of children succeeding in completing work. The latter was identified as a key concern particularly with older pupils.

The concept of a 'connected' curriculum which made sense to children, parents and staff was an important priority for the study primary schools. However it is noted that:

- A connected curriculum need not and should not exclude discrete subject teaching.
- Headteachers need to ensure that the principles of inclusion are built into thematic curriculum planning and regularly monitored.
- Clear moral and social imperatives feed into and influence innovatory curricula content and pedagogy.

7.8 Overall messages from the study

Overall, we note that curriculum innovation is more likely to be successful when:

- Teachers and school leaders see the potential benefit for pupils, their professional satisfaction and for the school and community as a whole.
- All school personnel are committed to and believe in its underlying values.
- All teachers and leaders are involved in the process of innovation from the initial idea to its implementation and review.
- Teachers trust and respect the leadership team.
- All staff welcome the opportunity to do things differently – to think creatively and laterally.
- All school staff are able to see the benefits and gains made by pupils.
- It is integral and closely interrelated to the short, medium and long term aims of the School Development Plan as well as the school's CPD programme.
- It is school created and school driven and is less likely to be sustained when it is derived from published schemes of work, materials or programmes of learning which are external to the school.
- Children are given the opportunity to contribute to curriculum innovation and planning.

7.9 Implications for leadership

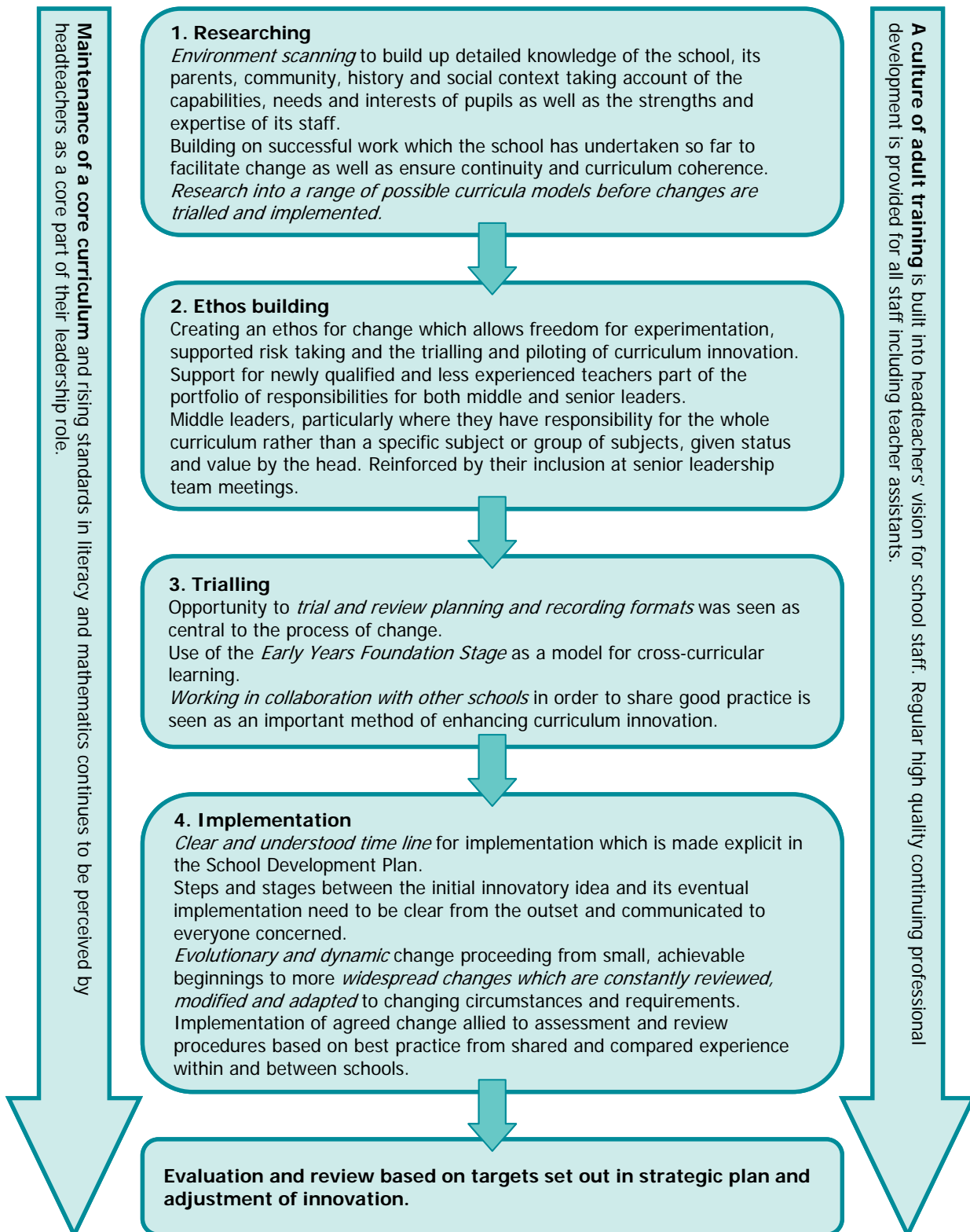
Primary school leaders, at all levels, welcome the freedom to innovate and change the curriculum, and it may be that the new freedoms, that appear to be embodied in a commitment to a looser control over the curriculum as whole, will be welcomed by many who see curriculum renewal and innovation as central to their professional identity. We conclude that support is needed in the following areas:

- Headteachers and other senior leaders in schools need to be encouraged and educated to create an ethos for change which empowers teachers to experiment with the curriculum through the adoption of distributed forms of leadership.
- Strong and successful leaders have a clear sense of when they need to pull back and slow down, as well as when to drive things forward at a faster rate. Such leaders bring together a vision for their school which is based on a clear understanding of the needs of the community and of pupils. The considerable work that has been carried out in recent years on developing strategic goals for schools needs to be built upon.
- For effective curriculum change to take place, the whole staff need to be involved in a shared activity that also recognises, from the outset, that pupil voice must be respected and encouraged, so that children share in the success that leads from managed change in the most vital area of a schools activity, that of teaching and learning. For this reason, middle leaders need to be supported in their own professional development in order that they can themselves develop the higher order leadership skills in areas such as financial management, assessment, and strategic development. This will enable them to envision change as an integrated, multi-faceted and whole-school activity.
- In-school and between-school co-operation is a key mechanism for successful change. Co-operation and collaboration strategies need to be encouraged that have a specific focus on learning and teaching, and curriculum development.

We have argued elsewhere that the field of primary leadership continues to lack a clear and well-defined underpinning empirical basis in the field. This study reveals that the child-centred, community-focused nature of successful primary schools means that primary school leaders are at the forefront of curriculum innovation.

Appendix 1: 4 stage model for curriculum innovation

As outlined within the executive summary, we offer a four-stage model of curriculum innovation based on the results of this study and driven by the feedback of the school leaders interviewed. This follows the four stages of researching, ethos building, trialling, and implementation



Within this model or form of curriculum innovation, change is evolutionary and dynamic. It proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements.

1. **Researching:** including environment scanning to build up detailed knowledge of the school, its parents, community, history and social context taking account of the capabilities, needs and interests of pupils as well as the strengths and expertise of its staff. Building on successful work which the school has undertaken so far to facilitate change as well as ensure continuity and curriculum coherence. This will enable Research into a range of possible curricula models before changes are trialled and implemented. Visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation are encouraged.
2. **Ethos building:** including creating an ethos for change which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of curriculum innovation. Support is provided for newly qualified and less experienced teachers as part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders. Middle leaders, particularly where they have responsibility for the whole curriculum rather than a specific subject or group of subjects, given status and value by the head and this is reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings.
3. **Trialling:** including opportunities to trial and review planning and recording formats was seen as central to the process of change. Use can be made of in-school best-practice such as the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning. Working in collaboration with other schools in order to share good practice is seen as an important method of enhancing curriculum innovation.
4. **Implementation:** including a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan. Steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation need to be clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned. Change is evolutionary and dynamic and proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements. Implementation of agreed change is allied to assessment and review procedures based on best practice from shared and compared experience within and between schools.

Throughout this process a focus on the core curriculum is maintained and a culture of adult learning runs alongside developments in the pupil curriculum so that the skills of leaders at all levels are increased in order to meet the demands of the new and revised approaches to learning and teaching.

Appendix 2: phase 1 case study vignettes

Case study vignette 1: primary headteacher, Simon

The headteacher of School B identified the need for sufficient time to allow change to take place in a carefully staged programme of development without the pressure of a looming deadline. This vignette illustrates how this ethos of change emerged within the school, involving both the staff and pupils, from the perspective of the headteacher.

Simon is in his fourth year of headship at School B. It is his first headship and he took over the school after a period of considerable instability in which 6 different headteachers had been appointed to the school in the preceding 3 years.

Simon explains the process of change which was taking place in his school. A clear planning process and the creation of an ethos of change emerged as being of significant importance to successful curriculum innovation. He also realised that part of the process of change would include changes to the leadership structure and the school's assessment strategy.

The message I have wanted to give to staff is that we're piloting this curriculum. This pilot phase has given staff permission to try different things and all attempts to make change will be valued.

Simon is concerned that planning is an ongoing, dynamic and reflective process with his staff. It serves as a dynamic tool which daily informs their professional dialogue throughout the pilot stage.

Formally, we've had one staff meeting to introduce planning and one to review it. But informally, we've had lots of incidental discussions. That's probably where all the thinking and tweaking and, you know, where all the real change is happening. Similarly we've looked at how we're recording children's work. You embark on this journey and you discover that it really does touch all areas of teaching and learning in the school. And, as we go through this year, there are things which are coming up all the time like so we haven't got 13 subjects any more. We've got 7 or 8 areas of learning and that's obviously going to affect the subject leadership structure and then that's going to affect how we're assessing children. It's enormous because then so much has to change. And yet, not losing all the good practice that's been going on in the school for the last 10 or 12 years. It's a matter of holding on to all the good bits.

Simon outlines the sequence of change as it evolved in his school.

We started all this in January, 2009. So it's only last year and we had two terms of grappling with where we wanted to go. So we've implemented a themed approach to curriculum as a kind of pilot from September, 2009 based on what were the proposed QCA Progressions in Learning for each area of learning at that point. But for the purposes of this research it cannot be underestimated just how much time schools need for thinking before actually doing it. We had two terms of just thinking about it and getting our heads round what this new curriculum might look like. We then initiated a pilot for a year because you need to run through an annual cycle of just trying things and

tweaking and adapting. By September, 2010 we're not going to be at a destination point but I think we're going to be closer to actually having something that we'll be running with.

Simon explains how he will evaluate the pilot along with his staff so that the process of reflection continues at both formal and informal levels. He is as concerned with the *ethos* he wishes to create, as he is with the *process* of evaluation.

I'm using the word 'pilot' because I just wanted to create this ethos for change for this year. So that, you know, you can try things out, you can take risks and let's collectively learn the lessons from those experiences, which is probably why I'm calling it a pilot. The evaluation is ongoing and that's the ethos I create in this school generally. I want people to be evaluative and constantly reflective of their practice and to feel free to try things and know that there's no such thing as a mistake. This ethos is particularly important for us at this time. I mean you've got a lot of teachers and I'm one of them. I qualified in 1996. I had one year of topic planning and then the Strategies came along – so you know, this is quite scary for someone like me and it's definitely scary for the NQTs who've had maybe, 3 or 4 years of very reductive curriculum delivery and being told what to teach and not actually having to think about it.

I mentioned the planning pro-formas just now and one of them is essentially a blank sheet of paper and it's being presented with a blank sheet and having to be creative about what you're looking for as well as creating a space for the children to contribute to the curriculum.

Simon was asked about how precisely he captured the children's input in the pilot curriculum.

We're at a very early planning stage – so when a topic or theme is introduced, we look at the QCA progression of learning documents and have a clear idea of what I mean I haven't wanted to lose that rigour of what we need to do in order for these children to reach age-related expectations by the end of Year 6 and for them to have the curriculum that they're entitled to. So we follow the QCDA Progression in Learning guidance but then, alongside that, it's effectively a blank sheet for teachers to 'mind-map' how that's going to work out. For example, what opportunities will be created in the class to meet those objectives? And one of the first activities that teachers do with children is to say, "Well, this is what I thought about how we'd approach the theme, Adventure and Exploration – but what do you think? What are your interests? What things are you aware of about that topic?" So the children contribute to that mind map.

Simon explained how he and his staff made decisions about which topics or themes the school would follow.

We have a two-year rolling programme of themes that we have decided upon at this stage. In future, we might want the children to come up with the themes. But as a starting point we've mapped out 2 years' worth of themes. We wanted to ensure that we had a breadth across the different areas of learning. So, some might be more scientifically focussed whilst others may be more historical. We also wanted to make sure that there were opportunities for issues like globalisation and having a global view of the world. We also wanted opportunities to be created for different cultural themes and extend the children's differing cultural experiences. So, over 2 years we wanted to present a diet of themes which run across each of the 6 areas of learning.

Case study vignette 2: class teacher, Faith

The issue of monitoring and assessment was considered to play a vital role in successful curriculum innovation by the Phase 2 schools. All the staff interviewed stressed the importance of ensuring that their systems were robust, rigorous and workable in their particular school context. Successful monitoring and assessment functioned to ensure that not only did pupils experience greater enjoyment, satisfaction and success in new ways of learning but standards and levels of achievement improved as a result. This vignette illustrates how monitoring and assessment was developed and utilised in two very different schools from the perspective of a deputy and assistant headteacher,

The staff in all three schools interviewed in phase 1 of the study appreciated and valued the headteacher's involvement at every stage of the process from senior members of staff to the newest teacher recruit. This vignette illustrates the involvement of teaching staff in the process of curriculum innovation from the perspective of a relatively new teacher.

Faith is an enthusiastic Year 4 class teacher and a member of the Humanities team. She has been a teacher at School A for 2 years having begun her career at the school as a newly qualified teacher.

Faith illustrates the way she is carrying out the school's adoption of a theme based curriculum in her classroom. Her lesson, continuing the study of World War 2, was observed:

Last July the school staff met and decided that we would embrace a new topic based curriculum which meant the whole school following a topic for a term. This term it is 'Significant People'. World War 2 is being studied but the children are not restricted to History but are also doing P.E., Dance and Gymnastics as well as English, using Goodnight Mr Tom by Michelle Magorian and script writing for Literacy. The displays in my classroom are not just of the children's work but are informative with many artefacts brought in by the class eg ration books and old gas masks which are on display in an 'Anderson Shelter' (which the children had made out of corrugated cardboard).

They are so enthusiastic when they bring in these objects and their parents feel involved as well. My next planned lesson will build on the previous week's role playing by making use of hand held video cameras to improvise and produce a jingle to go along with what they have written. My aim is for the children to take charge as much as possible.

When asked about the progress of implementing the new curriculum Faith replied:

Our staff is still in the process of taking ownership of the new curriculum which means that the QCA units remain influential and also we are unsure precisely what it is that Ofsted now want from us. In the summer the school will be going completely cross curricular while ensuring that the children continue to develop the requisite skills of Literacy and Numeracy. This is done via the meetings of the Humanities team eg staff are tasked with demonstrating that the key skills are being met, what needs to be improved and what are the available resources. Assessment is now more formative. Subject leaders also join the humanities meetings as appropriate. Feedback is given at the end of meetings on the ways changes could be made in order to move the work forward. Our teaching assistants do not always attend but they are kept fully up to date.

Faith said that she valued the staff training days:

We have had outside trainers coming to work with us on PSHE which was useful because there are always a lot of tricky questions which come up. I also enjoyed the one on ICT which I am especially keen to keep up to date with and phonics which I have not been particularly confident using

Faith responded to a comment made by the interviewer about the apparent confidence of the children in her class by saying:

The children have become much more independent learners but are still keen users of the Traffic Lights system where we use the colour Red for: didn't understand; Yellow for: almost understood and Green for: no help needed. It's their way of communicating with me. Sometimes if they are not too confident they will use 'red' even though they have understood perfectly well. I understand their need for support because that is exactly what I benefit from with team teaching and in particular from my team partner because I can go into her class at any time to look at the work her class is doing. In some schools you are just left entirely on your own.

Faith is certain that the school will be ready to implement the Rose Review recommendations and she has already seen the benefits for her children of a thematic approach eg the use of ICT which is so important for living in a globalised world. Some of the staff however, who have been used to a subject based curriculum, will need to be open to the changes required when Rose is implemented:

I have already seen a change in the way my children are using their new skills to become more independent learners because the work has become so much more meaningful to them. They have taken naturally to the opportunities afforded by ICT and it is up to us, the teachers, to move with them and not simply be reliant on the Interactive White Boards. Our aim must be to ensure that the children will be prepared for life in the modern world and not for living in the past. This involves helping them to become more independent and ready for change. It's harder for the older teachers who have been teaching for much longer than me because their training has been entirely focussed on the demands of the subject based National Curriculum. They will need to be brave and open to new ideas and prepared to learn from each other.

Resourcing the changes required by the Rose Review will be difficult but her headteacher is someone who can usually meet staff requests:

We are very lucky to have a headteacher who does his level best to provide video cameras and MP3 players for example. Furthermore the school is now benefitting from the excellent fundraising activities of the recently formed Friends of the School Association.

Early in the new school's history there was considerable anger among the local parents because of the closure of their local school but Faith was now able to say that the parents were fully supportive of the school's place in their community:

The parents have welcomed the regular fliers which inform them of the school work being done by their children. The first topic, which was carefully chosen by the school, was based on 'Our Town' and this did much to help bring the parents on board because their children were asking them questions about where they worked and where places were and this all involved them. Also we are finding that we have more children on the school roll now because the parents are aware of the school's excellent Ofsted results when they make their choice of school. I am convinced already that the new curriculum has produced enthusiastic learners and supportive parents.

Case study vignette 3: curriculum leader, Clive

The use of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and its commitment to areas of learning rather than discrete subject teaching was, in all three schools in phase of this study, taken and used as a model for development across the entire school up to Year 6. This vignette illustrates the involvement of teaching staff in the process of curriculum innovation from the perspective of the EYFS Leader.

Clive has been at the school for five years and is the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Leader and a teacher of the reception class but he also has a role in the Humanities team. When he was asked to expand a little on these roles Clive said:

As foundation stage leader I am in overall charge of the foundation stage, which is nursery and reception. But this academic year my work has been extended well into year 1 and I actually went into year 1 for the autumn term in order to ensure that the class I had last year made the transition from foundation to Key Stage 1 as smoothly as possible. The transition of children from the very play based curriculum of the EYFS into what traditionally has been the very subject based curriculum of KS1 has sometimes proved to be a difficult one of adaptation and as a result there's been a lot of discussion over the years about the best way for children to actually move from one to another. The thinking now with a lot of schools is to maintain as much of the curriculum from the Foundation years as possible into year 1, because that's the way children are used to learning.

Clive specified the benefits to be gained for staff and children from moving away from subject centred to a topic centred curriculum. In his Humanities role there was a gain in his knowledge of resource needs and the necessary coverage of subject material together with planning, monitoring and evaluation:

The rest of the staff is involved in 2 teams under the labels of 'Humanities' and 'Creative'. Rather than having separate subject leaders like it was in the past - now we have brought them together into 2 teams, which makes it a lot easier in terms of resourcing; trying to work out what resources we've got for school and therefore what resources we need in Humanities. It's made it easier in terms of looking at the coverage of individual subjects in terms of what's actually been done across the school, because there no longer is just one person who is responsible for each subject area. The consequence is responsibility has been taken for monitoring the kind of the planning taking place in different subject areas across the school and we've monitored what's actually being taught in those subject areas. The staff is now more involved in what's actually happening in those areas right across the school. We work as a team and quite a lot of our staff meetings are dedicated to subject team time, where we spend time in teams. It's also been getting the staff more involved in the School Evaluation Form (SEF). The Senior Leadership Team mainly have responsibility for this, but we've got more involved by having an input into that as well.

Clive believes leading this curriculum change requires both awareness of the range of subjects to be covered and the skills which need to be developed so that children can access them:

A leader needs to have an understanding of what needs to be covered within the school and what will be the skills outcomes for the children in switching from a subject based to a topic based curriculum. Teachers are a resource in themselves eg specialist knowledge of foreign languages or music.

When asked to illustrate what KS1 and KS2 might gain from a knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage Clive said:

I would point to Child Initiated Learning (CIL) as something which has come from the EYFS and seems likely to be adopted by the school up to years 5 and 6. For example this independent learning is likely to be developed when the older children are planning their projects.

Clive was somewhat cautious about the implementation of the proposed new primary curriculum seeing it as work in progress. He believed that the new technologies would have a considerable influence upon the new curriculum:

As far as the implementation of Rose is concerned I see our last year as being very much a pilot in terms of the teams and how they were going to work. I think the staff now is definitely getting used to thinking about links between subjects and breaking down those barriers between subjects. There is still a little way to go because for such a long time teachers have been teaching specific subjects and specific units of work, so it will take time to change that mindset.

We are trying to help that process by having focused weeks or days in school eg an arts or a science day or focus, where lots of different areas of learning are brought into that particular sort of day or week. Finally I would say that the new curriculum is likely to be heavily influenced by the developing technologies.

Appendix 3: phase 2 case study vignettes

The issue of monitoring and assessment was considered to play a vital role in successful curriculum innovation by the Phase 2 schools. All the staff interviewed stressed the importance of ensuring that their systems were robust, rigorous and workable in their particular school context. Successful monitoring and assessment functioned to ensure that not only did pupils experience greater enjoyment, satisfaction and success in new ways of learning but standards and levels of achievement improved as a result. This vignette illustrates how monitoring and assessment was developed and utilised in two very different schools from the perspective of a deputy and assistant headteacher,

Case study vignette 4: deputy headteacher, Chris and assistant headteacher, Beth

Focus: monitoring and assessment

This vignette illustrates how two senior leaders in different inner city schools have approached the complex issue of monitoring and assessing a cross-curricula approach to learning. Both have played key roles in ensuring that curriculum innovation is aligned closely to improved standards of achievement.

Chris is deputy headteacher of Swift Avenue Junior School with specific responsibility for monitoring standards across the school. He has been in post for five years and has played a key role in the development of a new curriculum. He has worked on a number of projects at the National College and is frequently invited to work with other schools on curriculum development.

Beth is one of four assistant headteachers at Tern Street Primary School with specific responsibility for assessment. She is on a year's secondment from a smaller inner city school which is affiliated to Tern Street Primary School in the form of a 'soft' or jointly negotiated federation.

Chris believes that carefully planned and well led innovation can have a powerful impact on the achievement profile of schools working in exceptionally challenging circumstances:

I think from talking personally, from my own perspective, looking at standards within our school and the impact that I think that Learning Journey has had on standards, I think that's one area where I would say to schools in challenging circumstances you know it can really help.

And also seeing some of the models of best practice, you know I've been lucky to hear of case studies where schools that were, had just gone through very, very hard OFSTED inspections should we say, have managed to turn it round ... and had become sort of outstanding schools due to curriculum innovation.

Chris's experience not only of the positive curriculum developments in his own school but also as a result of his work with other schools has convinced him that there is a strong relationship between curriculum innovation and improved standards of achievement:

And it was intriguing to see all the good things that people were doing, but they were also saying that it seemed to be driving up standards in their schools and that they could see a link between curriculum innovation and standards.

Asked to elaborate on a specific area of improvement in his own school, Chris referred to the writing performance of Year 6 children which had, three years ago, been lower than national expectations and therefore a key focus in his school's improvement plan:

One of our, one of the biggest improvements we've seen in our school has been in writing, writing and English, which is, you know when we first set out on our Learning Journey, one of the areas of our school improvement plan. So we wanted to try and use the Learning Journey to bring about improvement in that as well. And our English results last year were the highest they've ever been you know sort of since the records, and they've improved steadily over the last 3 years with the introduction of Learning Journey.

English was not only the area of improvement, increased levels of performance had occurred throughout the curriculum. Chris explains how standards are monitored during the process of curriculum innovation and how consistency is assured:

We regularly have meetings when as a staff we all meet together and we bring children's work with us, a large range of children's work, so that we can see what's going on in all the classes, the standard of work children are producing, we're a three from entry school, so you know across say Year 5, is there a difference? And so we do that a lot regularly and the co-ordinators are looking at the work the children produce as well, so that we can see that the children are producing sort of the best they can. So that, I mean there's a constant sort of monitoring. Talking to the children, I know the headteacher is constantly asking the children the bits they're enjoying, the bits they're not, what they think of it. The teachers monitor it, so there's a lot of monitoring of the actual substance and what the children are producing.

One of the main purposes of the constant monitoring was to ensure consistency of standards and appropriate interventions for individuals and groups of children who needed additional support. Chris explained that this involved regular half termly assessment and monitoring meetings in order to identify precisely where improvement was needed:

We do regular writing assessments, so each half term we do a writing assessment based around a different genre. Termly the teachers provide me, I'm the assessment co-ordinator as well, so I'll, they'll give me a level that the children are working at. We have moderation meetings and tonight we're looking at the work, the level 3, just level 3 work, to see, you know, are all the teachers, is the work of a similar standard that's being produced at level 3? We do the same in reading termly

assessments. We meet regularly to identify under achievers, and interventions that we can put in place to bring around improvement quickly to help those children. We have robust systems of assessment that regularly identify what levels the children are working at in reading, writing, maths and science.

Working within the context of a much larger school, Beth of Tern Street Primary School began with a close look at how the school was using data to inform teachers about pupil progress and achievement. She found, on taking up appointment, that the school had been meticulous in keeping ongoing data on the progress of all pupils within each year group. Given the data rich sources within the school she was keen to find ways in which the data could be used more creatively in order to widen its access beyond the senior leadership team to all teachers:

I could find lots of information on pupils for every single year group and we're a very big school. One of the things that I was concerned about was who had access to that data, because it seemed to be held in the possession of the senior leadership team, and in order to impact change, one of the things that I was concerned about was that everybody needed to be involved in that data collection, and everybody needed to see it. In order for data to be used as an effective assessment for learning tool, it cannot be held by senior managers, it needs to actually be held by every member of staff working with children.

She explained how she began the process of change:

So one of the things that we did when I began working here was I asked every year leader to give me all the possible data that they had on their current year group. They were asked to give me, track back as far as foundation stage, I wanted every single end of year level, I wanted every bit of information about those children in terms of vulnerability, whether those children had issues affecting their progress. And so basically as a whole staff team, we came up with portfolios for every single child in the school.

Beth was asked how she used this highly detailed source of information and what purpose it served:

What the data actually gave us was a list of potential groups that are significantly at risk of under achieving in this particular school. So what we did was we looked for trends in our data to see which groups were at risk. And when we looked at our RAISE online document and compared that with the data we held in school, the vulnerability of particular groups of children were very clear, Bengali boys, and white boys ...and rather than leave it there, we actually said well look, these groups are at risk, we need to do something about it now.

As a result of this data analysis Beth was able to target pupil tuition funding, additional support and help at the groups of children where the highest percentage of under achievement was clustered. Her rigorous approach to securing firm evidence bases for children's learning also informed her view of how curriculum innovation should be led and developed:

I honestly think that you know practice is set, best practice should be modelled from the top. I think headteachers and leadership teams should be showing their support of curriculum innovation and change, and they should be involved in leading and encouraging members of staff to develop. I also think excitement yes, but one of the things that we need to bear in mind is curriculum design cannot always be content led, it has to be skills based, and it's about making sure that yes, we're doing exciting things, we're doing fun things, but we need to have progression of skills, and that needs to be tracked and that needs to be evidenced and that needs to be targeted, and it needs to be moulded to suit the needs of the particular children that we're working with. So I think another key thing would be flexibility and adapting perhaps your vision to your cohort, to your groups of children, to the children that you want to reach.

According to Beth the tracking of a progression of skills across curriculum areas could be done very effectively by asking every member of staff to map out a skills-based question for each aspect of the six areas of learning recommended in the Rose Review:

You then look at how that fits in with the whole school progression of skills. It's, so yes, because that's the only way you can guarantee the rigour, that's the only way.

Beth then went on to describe how carefully designed skills based questions could lead to more advanced thinking and the transference of knowledge and skills to other areas of learning. In the following illustrative example, she explains how a class of Year 6 pupils working on a cross-curricula unit on building bridges, were asked to solve the following problem: Can you plan and make a bridge so that it can carry two litres of water without collapsing? The pupils were given a whole day to design and build their bridges:

They had to make an aqueduct, that's what it was, and we used a small, I think it was a ping pong ball, and we actually used water and we actually you know, we actually evaluated the bridges in terms of their ability, to move the ping pong ball across a certain length without collapsing the bridge. So that's what we did. And we set that sort of form of challenge in for the children, I can't remember the exact way we phrased it. But they absolutely loved it, they found it fantastic. And the thing was, it was quite special, I wasn't actually teaching that morning, I'd been involved in the unit and I actually sat in a corner and I actually watched a group of children. And when they were building the bridge, they weren't just building a bridge, you could see they were thinking about what they knew about cantilever bridges and so on, strong structures, and those children were having those discussions. And that was telling me that learning had taken place. And that was a really good indicator to me that everything they had done prior to that point, you know, they were transferring those skills in a different context, that means learning took place and that's I think the key. And that's what I like about the creative curriculum.

The impact of inclusion on the values which informed the curriculum is very well articulated by Rachel, a class teacher in her second year of teaching. She explains how it worked in her Year 6 class which existed in a social context fraught with long standing racial tensions and pupil behavioural challenges. This vignette illustrates very powerfully how a context sensitive, values-led curriculum can both empower and inform pupils in ways which accelerate learning at the same time as helping them to make clear gains in their social, emotional and moral development. Towards the end of the vignette a compellingly vivid illustration is given of how the use of open questions with the aid of a glove puppet, can advance pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding.

Case study vignette 5: class teacher, Rachel

Focus: Implementing a values-led curriculum in a Year 6 class

Rachel is a Year 6 class teacher at Heronsgate Primary School. She is in her second year of teaching having been a former teaching assistant.

The main focus for curriculum renewal in the school has been the formation of a values led curriculum which places inclusion, self-esteem, respect for others, social moral and emotional development, at the centre of its philosophy. This vignette gives a snap-shot, teacher account of how this works in her classroom.

When Rachel joined the staff of the school, they had just begun to move away from a subject based curriculum to a thematic approach to learning. She describes how she perceived and understood the changes from her perspective as a newly qualified teacher:

So rather than being boiled down to oh we're doing English now or history now or science now, the way I've been teaching and planning is, it begins from a concept, and you make sure that the areas of learning, as differentiated in the new curriculum, are represented and you've got the coverage there, within your work on that concept. But the concept can actually, can actually take you everywhere you need to go. So I found it particularly useful to think about the thematic learning that we've been doing, which bases our curriculum planning around a theme, to make that theme conceptual as opposed to concrete, because that has, I think there are two major benefits, one is that it allows me to link it much more to the children and their experiences, and their understanding and their lives. And also I think it develops, for me, I think it's really exciting in terms of the thinking and the intellectual skills it develops, and the fact that it can be so open ended, I find really, really liberating as well, so the children can take it wherever they want.

Rachel elaborates in considerable detail some of the themes she has explored during the course of the year and how she ensured that the complex concepts she introduced related closely to the children's and their families' lives:

So this year the themes that we've covered in year 6 are revolution, evolution, migration and enlightenment, and currently our theme for this term is mercury rising, which means sort of climate change and the environment and that kind of thing. And the ways that we have kind of, particularly I've seen it just really relate to children's lives, we've done a lot of work in revolution about different liberation movements, we looked at racial equality and sexual equality, and also equality between sexualities as well. And this is something that children had lived in this school, and we all have lived, but actually to ask them to see themselves as part of that paradigm has allowed them to express things that otherwise they might not have ever got an opportunity to express and think about in school. So actually, we've had conversations where children have been very, very open in their experiences of racism, very, very open in their, even kind of low level feelings of you know, well actually I've always thought it was a bit unfair that this happened like this, and put that in some kind of historical process. The other thing that I think has been really important is looking at working class movements and working history, which for the kids that we teach here, for example in the revolution subject we did a lot of work on the Battle of Cable Street, which is local history, and it's local history, it's also working class history. And that was really important in terms of trying to give the children a sense of their own history that they are a part of ...

Her commitment to bringing the children's history to life through local visits places a value and status upon their community history which the children relish and appreciate:

... We did trips to Brick Lane and this is a very local area, but lots of children will not have been there, lots of children's families will spend huge amounts of time there. So in a class where you've got half of them that would never have been to Brick Lane, half of them which have pretty much grown up in Brick Lane, and to link that together, and to say actually we are giving value to where your families live and work, and that is part of your education, and we are giving that value. It's so powerful for them to walk away thinking, cor, that's my uncle's restaurant, and we've just done some learning about it, that's, you know it's a real boost.

Rachel does not underestimate the challenges and difficulties of implementing a curriculum of this kind and which also has to ensure pupil progress and improved standards of achievement. This presents particular problems for her as recently trained teacher:

Well, I think it's difficult because I'm of a generation of teachers that was not educated in a particularly creative way, yeah. I was also one of the first cohort of pupils to take the SATs tests, so my education as a pupil and student teacher was very much of that order.

When asked about the key skills that she thought were necessary to make a curriculum of this kind work in ways which engaged and connected with her pupils, she emphasized the important role which knowledge and an empathic understanding of their lives, had to play in her thinking and planning:

I think you need, I think you need an outward looking, some kind of engagement if not knowledge with the world around you, I think that is so essential, and that is a thing that springs to mind as being, if you're going to teach in an expansive and creative way, you've got to yourself, have an idea of what's going on out there and have, you know, have an idea of exactly what opportunities there are for learning in, and what things children kind of could be interested in and aware of in the world that they're living in. And I think, I think that means having an understanding, very much an understanding of the community in which you work. And for me, that's what I try and bring in to the classroom.

Rachel also wants to ensure that her children encounter an expansive and rich curriculum in which a critical consciousness of the world in which they live is as important as appreciating its wonder and beauty. Her pupils also have to learn to live with a culture of gang crime and racial conflict which many of her pupils are anxious about being pressured into, particularly when they go to secondary school. She believes strongly that issues like these and learning how to deal to talk about them openly, should be part of the curriculum. In this sense the curriculum she wants to provide for her pupils is also morally and socially informed:

... you want children to have a sense of the Himalayan Mountains, you want children to have a sense of what communism might look like, you want children to have a sense of you know just all the different kind of, as broad as you can imagine, but kind of almost different realities, completely different environments, different experiences, that might trigger something in an imaginative or in a kind of cognitive sense. So I think, and I think also, like also more kind of contemporarily you've got to have a feeling for what's going on in the world, because I just don't think you can get away from the fact that education is so political you know, the classroom is microcosm of the world these kids are living in, and they bring it all in with them, and I think to try and ignore that, and try and ignore the stuff they're dealing with, and try and ignore, try and make it a completely neutral space where we don't, you know, we don't worry about any of the stuff that's going on outside, to me just seems unacceptable.

The values which inform Rachel's Year 6 curriculum do not come at the expense of knowledge and conceptual understanding nor are they perceived as distinct and separate. Moral, social and emotional development is closely and imaginatively interwoven with conceptual knowledge. In science, for instance, Rachel uses open ended questions and a problem solving approach to learning. In the following example she introduces children to the question of what causes spring to occur each year. She hooks the children's interest with a captivating story told through a puppet about a grandma who is depressed because she is suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder and refuses to believe that spring has arrived. Grandad is getting worn down by grandma's depression and wants to find a way of proving to her that spring has come. So the problem for the children is to provide the grandad with evidence of spring:

I've got children making scrapbooks of, and proving that things grow when the ground is getting warmer, when the days are getting lighter, that they need the light for photosynthesis and all of that. I've got children making models of the solar system and proving that we have seasons because of the earth being on a slant and rotating ya di ya. I've got children going to Mudshoot Farm and looking at the gestation periods of animals and saying well animals have all their babies in spring, why do animals have their babies in spring? What's that about? And looking at the different types of animals, do all animals have their babies in spring? And all of that stuff touches on a huge amount of research that's going on, all of the essential skills for life, all of the collaborative learning, thinking skills, all of that kind of stuff, social skills, and also quite personal kind of thinking skills as well. But also there's just so much science, and I'm not going to say well this is a physics project, you need to be thinking about the earth and space, or this is a biology project, you need to be thinking about how plants make food. It's how do you make grandma believe that spring is here? And from that, and they will feed it back, and children will gain a huge amount of knowledge from other groups about what other groups are doing, and that will take us now up to half term in a way that the kids are just, and they just believe it. I mean they're eleven year olds, and I've got a puppet on my hand, and they believe it and because they want to know how to help the granddad.

Appendix 4: curriculum innovation in primary schools checklist

This checklist is based on the main finding of the study as outlined in Appendix 7. The checklist outlines the key leadership processes, actions and skills involved in successful curriculum innovation grouped under a number of headings. It can be used in a variety of ways, such as:

- A simple checklist to analyse whether best-practice is being followed.
- A focus for discussions in team meetings and staff meetings.
- An aid to planning curriculum change by examining each item in turn to make sure a strategy has been put in place that will take account of all the items listed.

Suggestions for the uses of each section are outlined in the boxes in the text.

Leadership and leadership structures

- Have leadership structures been adjusted so that they positively impact upon learning in the classroom?
- Are regular meetings scheduled to discuss and evaluate children’s work as well as check on progress and quality? If so do such meetings involve teachers and all levels of leadership in order to ensure the widest constituency of knowledge on standards, assessment and monitoring?
- Is curriculum change welcomed by all staff? If not, why not? Are particular stakeholders concerned about change? If so, why are they concerned?
- Has the school leadership team worked to ensure that research into a range of possible curricula models is carried out before changes are trialled and implemented?

1. Use the leadership checklist (above) to work out who is responsible for the key issues indicated in the process of innovation and change.
2. Discuss the list in senior staff meetings or during staff development sessions. Establish which leadership activities should be located at senior leadership level, which at key stage or co-ordinator level, and which at classroom level.
3. Note which activities are whole-school, whole-staff issues. Do staffing structures reflect the leadership activities that are required for innovation?

Strategy

- Have clear moral and social imperatives been agreed that feed into and influence innovatory curricula content and pedagogy?
- Are staff positively encouraged to do things differently, to think laterally and creatively?
- Are children an essential part of the process with respect to decision making. Are they involved in the early stages of innovation?
- Is there a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan?
- Are the steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned?
- Does the strategy that has been developed use all staff in a joint endeavour directed towards the implementation of the new curriculum?
- To what extent has curriculum innovation been tied into overall school effectiveness strategies and plans?
- Has best practice within the school been drawn on such as using the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning throughout the school?
- Has environment scanning taken place in order to ensure a good fit with the school’s particular contextual needs and circumstances?

-
1. Use the strategy checklist to work out short-term, medium-term and long-term goals for innovation.
 2. Examine current school development plans and establish which targets are relevant to the process of innovation and change.

Planning, progression, assessment and evaluation

- Have small, achievable targets been set that will lead to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements?
- To what extent are leadership structures, professional development, whole school planning and workable assessment and monitoring systems connected?
- Are the principles of inclusion built into curriculum planning and regularly monitored?
- Do curricula themes or projects identify a clear progression of skills understanding and knowledge which is capable of being tracked and recorded?
- Has explicit guidance been developed and agreed in constructing new formats which capture cross-curricular approaches to learning?
- Have opportunities been provided to trial and review planning and recording formats?
- Has time and space for reflection and evaluation been provided by allocating time for meetings discussions, visits to other schools and research into new approaches?

1. Use the planning checklist during staff meeting or development days to examine current planning documentation.
2. Focus on current and proposed assessment and evaluation strategies in order to make sure that the focus on learning and achievement will be maintained and enhanced by any innovation.

Teaching and learning

- Have paired partnerships with other, similar sized schools been explored in order to plan and follow through similar themes and topics together?
- Have steps been taken to ensure the maintenance of a core curriculum so that rising standards in literacy and mathematics continue to be perceived as a core part of leadership roles regardless of the type, form or model of curriculum innovation chosen for implementation?
- To what extent are you confident that an ethos for change has been created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching?

-
1. Use the teaching and learning checklist to establish the ways in which pupil learning can be improved by innovation.
 2. In particular, consider proposed themes and the way in which they may be made to focus children on key points in their learning and personal progression.
 3. Ask yourself what artefacts and materials are required to assist in learning and consider the implications for school budget planning.

INSET and in-school professional development

- Is adult training built into the agreed vision for school staff? Is regular high quality continuing professional development provided for all staff including teacher assistants?
- Are middle leaders given status and value reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings?
- Is support for newly qualified and less experienced teachers part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders?
- Are struggling staff, if any, supported sensitively? Is guidance structured into programmes of training and development?
- Have opportunities been explored to engage the expertise of others such as external experts in classroom workshops and whole school INSET programmes?
- Have visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation been encouraged and facilitated?

1. Use the INSET checklist to assist in the planning of staff development activities. Leaders at all levels should consider how staff need to be supported during the process of change.
2. Consider what internal and external support is required. Adjust INSET plans according to perceived need and consider how systems such as coaching and mentoring could be applied to assist in professional development in ways that will support innovation.

Appendix 5: process diagram of curriculum innovation

The figure on the succeeding page offers a 'process diagram' of curriculum innovation. Process modelling is a method for improving organisational efficiency and quality. Its beginnings were in the business world, but the methodology is applicable to any organised activity. Put simply process modelling aims to improve business performance by optimising the efficiency of connecting activities in the provision of a product or service. Process modelling techniques are concerned with 'mapping' and 'workflow' to enable understanding, analysis and positive change. 'Flow diagrams' are a central feature of the methodology and this diagram represents the processes involved in curriculum innovation.

This process diagram can form the basis for a workshop or discussion in staff meetings or training days to explore the stages of the curriculum innovation process.

Two suggested exercises are:

- Examine the model of change offered here which is based on best-practice. Work through the five stages shown and compare the processes currently used in the school to implement innovation. How do current school processes compare to those in the diagram? Which elements of current school practice could be amended? What new approaches could be adopted? What elements of current practice should be retained?
- Develop your own flow diagram of the processes of innovation in school. Brainstorm the various approaches and techniques used at the moment and note on a flip-chart the current main stages of development that are used. Work in small groups to create your own process of diagram of practice and compare with the diagram opposite to work out places where innovation may stall or problems that might be faced. Note key points on flip chart paper and then use these to make a large-scale flow diagram that can be used as a focus for further whole-staff discussion.

Process diagram of curriculum innovation

- Initial consultation with staff, governors, parents and children.
- Discussions with partner schools.
- Initial involvement of pupils.
- Analysis of key targets and relevance to strategic plans.
- Baselines assessments to establish success indicators.
- Analysis of staff needs



- Staff meetings and training events focused on curriculum needs, possible curriculum innovation and allied system of assessment and evaluation.
- Inset events to include external and internal advice on best practice.
- Establishment of initial realistic goals in collaboration with children.
- INSET activities and in-school support.



- Continued consultation and information to parents and governors.
- Ongoing visits to other schools.
- Trialling and trying out of new approaches.
- Joint planning events including staff teams and whole staff meetings.



- Full implementation of revised curriculum.
- Sharing of best practice with colleagues in and between schools.
- Celebration of success during events and activities.



- Assessment and evaluation of curriculum change.
- Comparison with initial targets.
- Reflection on success and failure.
- Adjustments in light of experience.

Appendix 6: schools in phase 1, type and social context

School A

School A is a two form entry, urban school (approximately 385 pupils on roll). It opened as a flagship school in 2004 as a result of the amalgamation of two schools. It has large outdoor play areas, a Children's Centre and a pre-school. It is also the hub school for Extended Services provision. It has been extensively refurbished and is extremely well equipped with the latest ICT technology. The school was recently awarded a judgement of 'Grade 1 with outstanding features' by Ofsted. The headteacher's considerable leadership experience has had a positive impact on the development and improving profile of the school. Two guiding principles have underpinned the direction of curriculum change; every subject matters and child initiated learning.

David: Headteacher. In post for 17 years

School B

School B is a two form entry urban school with 369 pupils on roll situated in one of the worst areas with respect to social disadvantage. Simon was appointed headteacher three years ago following a period of frequent changes of headteacher. He commented that had Ofsted made a visit in his first year of headship, it would very likely have been placed in a 'cause for concern' category. Most of the children in the school are currently working below national averages.

Apart from the multiple problems which many of his children experience, large numbers of parents also have complex psychological and social problems. In this context some remarkable work is being done by the head and his staff in association with Parentline Plus (an independent charity which supports parents in need). It is the head's belief that the success of any planned curriculum change is strongly related to how far it will meet and address the social needs of both the children and their parents/carers.

Simon: Headteacher: 3 years

School C

School C is a small, one form entry primary school with 140 children on roll. Before Paula's appointment as headteacher in 2006 the school had experienced leadership discontinuity and a relatively high staff turn-over. Pupil achievement suffered as a result and a recent Ofsted inspection identified academic achievement and writing, in particular, as in need of significant improvement. In Paula's words, 'innovation was borne out of desperation' and not as part of a staged process of development leading towards the implementation of the Rose curriculum. An enrichment programme to engage the children's interest was put into operation just over a year ago in 2009 (see details in the introductory section above).

Paula is a relatively young headteacher in her first post. She is now in her fourth year of headship and the changes she began to make last year are already having an observable impact on behaviour, children's involvement, academic standards and the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Paula: Headteacher: 4 years

Appendix 7: schools in phase 2, type and social context

Ravenscroft Junior School

A two-form entry school set in an affluent part of an industrial suburb with a pupil roll of 240. Pupil achievement is considerably above national expectations and a recent Ofsted inspection judged the school to be Grade 1 Outstanding having previously been rated Grade 3 Satisfactory. The very successful Ofsted outcome was due in part to the implementation of several creative curriculum initiatives especially in music along with the high quality of children's project books which had made excellent use of ICT as a central tool for learning. Parents have very high aspirations for their children which frequently manifests itself in demanding and sometimes, excessive expectations of the staff.

Harry: Headteacher. In post for almost 6 years

Andy: Deputy Headteacher with responsibility for the co-ordination of the curriculum and assessment

Richard: Curriculum leader for Mathematics and ICT

Finch Lane Church of England, Primary School

A one-form entry Church of England school set in a mainly affluent, rural community with some representation of families from less privileged socio-economic groups. It was the smallest school in the Phase 2 research project with 130 pupils on roll. The school received an Ofsted Grade 1 Outstanding for its most recent inspection.

Wendy: Headteacher. In post for 6 years

Tricia: Curriculum leader for the creative curriculum

Swift Avenue Junior School

A three-form entry junior school with a pupil roll of 384 pupils. It is located in the centre of a large, urban city and has a very mixed social, cultural and ethnic intake including white British, Afro-Caribbean, and Asian and Eastern European pupils. The social class distribution is wide including children whose parents work at the city university and approximately 40 per cent of children whose families are on income support. The headteacher was on the 0 - 14 Advisory Group for the Rose Review. In their most recent school inspection, Ofsted judged the school to be Grade 1 outstanding.

Bridget: Headteacher. In post for 14 years

Chris: Deputy Headteacher with responsibility for monitoring standards across the school

Whitney: Curriculum leader for curriculum design and Year 6

Wanda: Curriculum leader for curriculum design and Year 3

Swallowfield Primary School

A one-form entry, Church of England primary school set in the suburban outskirts of a large city. It has a pupil roll of 208 and over 60 per cent are from African ethnic groups with 20 per cent of pupils on free school meals. The school was undergoing an extensive rebuild and refurbishment at the time of the research. In its most recent Ofsted inspection the school was judged to be Grade 2 Good with some outstanding features. The headteacher worked with the QDCA in the gathering of the evidence base for the Rose Review.

Gwen: Headteacher. In post for 5 years

Pauline: Deputy Headteacher with responsibility for Assessment, Inclusion and Literacy

Barbara: Curriculum Leader for mathematical development

Tern Street Primary School

The largest, three-form entry school in the sample with a pupil roll of over 700 pupils. It is located in a large, urban city and between 75 and 80 per cent of pupils have a first language which is not English. 40 per cent of the school's population comprises a mix of Asian Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils. When the headteacher took on the headship, the school had a history of severe pupil behaviour problems and underachievement which led to it being placed in a 'Special Measures' category by Ofsted. The raising of standards and the improvement of assessment systems have been central to the school's focus since the current headteacher's appointment and in its most recent inspection the school was judged to be Grade 2 Good with outstanding features. The school has been extensively extended and refurbished having been originally designed as an Open Plan school. Because of an increasingly transient pupil population from diverse ethnic groups and the need for rapid progress in the speaking of English, every class is equipped with 'Surround Sound' which is hard wired into the interactive white boards. Every class teacher uses a high quality microphone as part of a tool for whole class teaching. The school is the lead school in a federation of two neighbouring schools. The headteacher served on the 0 - 14 Advisory Group for the Rose Review.

Laura: Headteacher who is also the executive headteacher for the federation. She has been in post for over 5 years

Beth: Assistant headteacher with responsibility for assessment

Nancy: Acting Deputy Head with responsibility for Inclusion and Year 6

Caroline: Acting Deputy Head on secondment from the partner federated school with responsibility for literacy

Heronsgate Primary School

A large, two-form entry primary school with a pupil roll of 330. It is located in a large city centre and over half the pupils in the school are of Asian Bangladeshi origin but at one time over 80 per cent of the pupils came from Bangladeshi families. The school now includes white English working class, Eastern European and Vietnamese children. When the current headteacher first assumed responsibility for the school, there were considerable racial tensions both in the community and in the school. Night time gang crime, often related to drug trafficking, is a common feature of community life. The main focus for curriculum renewal in the school has been the formation of a values led curriculum which places self-esteem, the respect for others, moral and emotional development, at the centre of its philosophy. Many of the children in the school perform well below national averages, and whilst overall achievement has risen, a significant number of pupils fall a long way short of national achievement targets. The school chose to reject the National Strategies for Literacy or Mathematics since it was the strong belief of the staff that children in this particular social and educational context would not be able to access its content or pedagogy. The school has a policy of not setting children for any subjects or areas of the curriculum. In its most recent inspection, the school was judged by Ofsted to be Grade 2 Good with some outstanding features.

Beatrice: Headteacher. In post for 11 years

Sam: Deputy Headteacher with responsibility for inclusion and general leadership/ management of the school.

Rachel: Year 6 class teacher

Wrencroft Church of England, Primary School

A one-form entry, Church of England, primary school with a pupil roll of 201. The school is set in an attractive rural village where the majority of parents are white British professionals from mainly lower middle and middle class social groups. A small number of parents are from less privileged circumstances and could be considered to be part of an aspirant working class social grouping. The parents have high expectations of the school and are largely supportive of the life and work of the school. The school has a strong team of staff and a significant proportion of high achieving children. In the last two years it has had considerable success with their newly designed 'connected curriculum' which has been informed and inspired by the Thinking Actively in the Social Context (TASC) model. In the school's most recent Ofsted inspection, it was judged to be Grade 1 Outstanding.

Cathy: Headteacher. In post for 6 years

Mary: Deputy Headteacher with responsibility for Literacy, assessment and CPD

Francis: Curriculum Leader with responsibility for the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

Appendix 8: list of main findings of the study

A list of the main findings of the study is provided below. No hierarchy of importance is implied.

Suggested exercise:

Examine the list of the main findings of the study in discussion with staff or in a workshop. Identify those which most pertain to your school and context and prioritise your “top ten” in order of how important they are to the development of curriculum in your school.

- There was a strong sense that curriculum change is welcomed, especially if it allows and encourages innovation by the schools themselves.
- Leading curriculum innovation is challenging and complex but it is welcomed by headteachers, all of whom view the leadership of learning as central to their role.
- All of the schools reported the necessity of allowing time and space for reflection, evaluation and a carefully staged process of change with the whole school working in a unified direction.
- An ethos for change needs to be created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching.
- Curriculum change needs to take full account and have a good fit with the school's particular contextual needs and circumstances.
- A clear steer by both central agencies and individual school leaders is required if the important work schools have carried out with respect to planning, tracking and monitoring progress, is not to be lost.
- Teachers value explicit guidance in constructing new formats which capture cross-curricular approaches to learning as well as the skills and knowledge to be covered in specific subject areas.
- The opportunity to trial and review planning and recording formats was seen as central to the process of change.
- The use of the Early Years Foundation Stage as a model for cross-curricular learning throughout the school was viewed as having an important role in helping schools move towards the curriculum innovation and change.
- Teachers feel that there is a positive relationship between curriculum innovation and school effectiveness.
- The key leadership skill in curriculum innovation is the judicious and strategic use of all staff in a joint endeavour directed towards the implementation of a revised curriculum.
- Working in collaboration with other schools in order to share good practice is seen as an important method of enhancing curriculum innovation. Visits, staff exchanges and the sharing of strategies between schools which have begun to experiment and trial new approaches to curriculum innovation seem to offer a powerful set of tools that will assist in the achievement of new approaches to learning and teaching.
- Schools need to be provided with advice on strategies that assist in recognising areas of the curriculum which need strengthening. Engaging the expertise of others in classroom workshops and whole school INSET programmes is also seen as being important.
- In order for effective curriculum innovation to occur it is clear that an ethos for change needs to be created which allows freedom for experimentation, supported risk taking and the trialling and piloting of cross-curricular approaches to teaching.
- Curriculum change needs to take full account and have a good fit with the school's particular contextual needs and circumstances.
- Curricula themes or projects should identify a clear progression of skills understanding and knowledge which is capable of being tracked and recorded.
- Regular meetings to discuss and evaluate children's work as well as check on progress and quality need to involve teachers and all levels of leadership in order to ensure the widest constituency of knowledge on standards, assessment and monitoring.

- Leadership structures positively impact upon learning in the classroom. Effectively led curriculum innovation improves standards of achievement and increases children's enjoyment and engagement in learning.
- Successful innovations are more likely to be sustained if leaders ensure that research into a range of possible curricula models is carried out before changes are trialled and implemented.
- Curriculum innovation has a clear and understood time line for implementation which is made explicit in the School Development Plan.
- The steps and stages between the initial innovatory idea and its eventual implementation need to be clear from the outset and communicated to everyone concerned.
- Curriculum innovation is founded upon a detailed knowledge of the school, its parents, community, history and social context. It takes careful account of the capabilities, needs and interests of its pupils as well as the strengths and expertise of its staff. It builds on the successful work which the school has undertaken so far in ways which facilitate change as well as ensure continuity and curriculum coherence.
- The maintenance of a core curriculum and rising standards in literacy and mathematics continues to be perceived by headteachers as a core part of their leadership role regardless of the type, form or model of curriculum innovation chosen for implementation.
- Throughout the process of curriculum innovation effective leaders ensure that struggling staff are supported sensitively. Guidance and support is more effective when it is not ad hoc but structured into programmes of training and development.
- In the larger schools support for newly qualified and less experienced teachers was part of the portfolio of responsibilities for both middle and senior leaders.
- Middle leaders, particularly where they have responsibility for the whole curriculum rather than a specific subject or group of subjects, need to be given status and value by the head. This is reinforced by their inclusion at senior leadership team meetings.
- A culture of adult training is built into headteachers' vision for school staff. Regular high quality continuing professional development is provided for all staff including teacher assistants. The involvement of the latter is particularly important in schools where TAs are used increasingly to assess and monitor children with special educational needs.
- In the best examples of good practice, children were an essential part of the process with respect to decision making and involvement in the early stages of innovation.
- Best practice in the leadership of curriculum innovation ensures that the process of innovation is seen by staff as an opportunity to do things differently, to think laterally and creatively.
- In smaller, one-form entry schools where there is less opportunity to plan within year groups or to share good practice and successful ideas, heads were beginning to establish paired partnerships with other, similar sized schools so they could plan and follow through similar themes and topics together.
- Innovation is more likely to become part of the school's ethos and culture when it is built into its leadership structures, professional development, whole school planning and workable assessment and monitoring systems. A connected curriculum need not and should not exclude discrete subject teaching.
- Headteachers need to ensure that the principles of inclusion are built into thematic curriculum planning and regularly monitored.
- Clear moral and social imperatives feed into and influence innovatory curricula content and pedagogy.
- Change is evolutionary and dynamic and proceeds from small, achievable beginnings to more widespread changes which are constantly reviewed, modified and adapted to changing circumstances and requirements.
- Primary school leaders, at all levels, welcome the freedom to innovate and a commitment to a looser central control over the curriculum as a whole will be welcomed by many who see curriculum renewal and innovation as central to their professional identity.

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Fairlands Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

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Freezywater St George's CEVA Primary School, London

Harbinger Primary School, London

Hartwell CE Primary School, Northampton

Nascot Wood Junior School, Watford, Hertfordshire

The Reddings Primary School, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire

Welton CE Primary School, Northampton

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