

Rose Review of the Primary Curriculum

TACTYC Response to the Interim Report

TACTYC (*Training, Advancement and Co-operation in Teaching Young Children*) was founded in 1978, initially to support tutors of advanced courses for teachers of young children. Members are drawn from academic, advisory and training organisations and include early years practitioners in all sectors. TACTYC represents more than 350 very highly qualified and experienced educators, with particular expertise in the early years.

1. General comment

1.1 There is much to welcome in this interim report. The identification of six areas of understanding rather than a sole reliance on separate subjects is potentially very useful although further work will be needed to assure coverage and progression that takes account of learning and development.

1.2 The proposed structure will ease continuity from the EYFS into primary school, and help teachers to plan meaningful and motivating work for children. It is essential that personal, emotional and social development and creative development, which feature as areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are explicitly included as aspects of all the proposed six areas of understanding in the primary curriculum.

1.3 The emphasis on spoken communication is important. This must include an appreciation of the importance of word comprehension, which leads to the development of conceptual thought, as well as word recognition. With children who have special needs in mind, TACTYC suggests that communication should explicitly include signing.

1.4 We await recommendations on the two early learning goals on writing and trust that the unrealistic expectations will be relaxed. We are prepared to present further evidence on this, building on the submission we made to the Rose Review of Early Reading.

2. Assessment and testing

2.1 Mention of the pressures exerted by the assessment and testing arrangements is highly relevant. Although discussion of assessment has been excluded from the report, in practice the SATs in both Key Stages have a significant effect on priorities within the primary curriculum. This is magnified by OFSTED's reliance on data and the way that league tables dominate public perceptions of school success.

2.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is intended to be a formative assessment, but the impact of the Outcomes Duty laid upon local authorities is leading to pressures to show measurable increases in children's scores for literacy and numeracy and of their personal and social development, at the end of the reception year, which is resulting in a distortion of priorities within the early years curriculum in many schools.

3. The duties of schools and local authorities

3.1 It was the *Education Reform Act 1988* which laid the duty on schools to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepare them for the *opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life*. The Education and Inspections Act (2006) referred to in the interim report expects local authorities to:

- a) promote high standards,

- b) ensure fair access to educational opportunity, and
- c) promote the fulfilment by every child concerned of his educational potential.

4. Age ranges within the EYFS and Key Stage 1

4.1 Throughout the interim report, the EYFS is characterised as covering the ages from birth-to-five, and Key Stage 1 from five-to-seven. This can be misleading, given that the EYFS continues until the end of the reception year, when some children may be nearly six-years old, and tends to reinforce common assumptions that the reception class is part of Key Stage 1.

4.2 Virtually all children in England currently enter reception classes well before the compulsory school starting date, which is the term after their fifth birthday. This is earlier than most other countries. The Secretary of State's comments about the need for greater flexibility around entry to primary school reflect continuing concerns about the counter-productive pressures faced by many children in the reception class, especially the summer born cohort, many boys, and some children who have special educational needs. The reception class, we reiterate, sits within the EYFS although much practice does not reflect this in relation to the promotion of playful, active and experiential learning.

5. Recommendation 2

5.1 TACTYC agrees that the *EYFS* and the *National Curriculum* at Key Stages 1 and 2 should be reviewed as a whole in future, and suggest that this should be considered as part of the planned EYFS review in 2010. Our particular concern is with the early learning goals for writing, and we trust that before this report is finalised, consultation will be held with the early education advisory group and others who will be involved in the EYFS review. Since fewer than half the children achieve these goals at the end of the reception year through no fault of their own, the majority will in any case need further experience compatible with the EYFS approach in Year 1, as acknowledged in Recommendation 13.

6. Recommendation 10 (i) Entry into reception class in the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday should become the norm. The Review will explore how this might be achieved without unduly restricting parental choice, for example, by allowing parents to choose a period of part-time attendance.

6.1 This proposal means that children would be admitted to school up to a year below the statutory school starting age, which does not offer the flexibility expressly proposed by the Minister in his remit letter, which specified:

One of the messages of the Time to Talk consultation was that we should be concerned with the development of the whole child, as well as their level of attainment.

Entry to primary school can be problematic for summer born children ... this can affect their performance up to the age of 16. I would like your review to give particular consideration as to how we can design the curriculum to improve outcomes for summer born children.

In the Children's Plan, some parents indicated that they would like greater flexibility over when their child can start primary school – for example, having the choice to start in September, January, or a whole year later... given the concern expressed to us by parents I would like you to consider whether it

would be appropriate to allow more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school.

6.2 TACTYC believes that the recommendation should be re-framed, as the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* research quoted does not justify this conclusion. EPPE findings address issues around length of time in pre-school, not in KS1:

Findings at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2) are generally in line with those found in Year 1 ... The results confirm the important impact of background influences on young children, including the importance of the home learning environment. They also provide additional evidence concerning the impact of pre-school and show that positive pre-school effects related to duration, quality and effectiveness are not 'washed out' for cognitive outcomes by the end of Year 2 in primary school. (Sammons *et al.* 2004)

6.3 Recent findings from the related EPPSE project on children aged 10, which were presented at a recent BERA conference by Professor Sylva, confirm the importance of the home learning environment (HLE):

The implication of these findings is that policy development should seek to promote strategies to support improvements in the early years home learning environment, especially for vulnerable groups and also work to improve the quality and effectiveness of pre-school provision. (Sylva 2007)

6.4 Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), in a literature review commissioned by the DfES, confirm that what parents do with their children at home is much more significant than any other factor open to educational influence.

6.5 It has not yet been possible to interrogate the evidence from the National Strategies CLLD programme quoted in the interim report but, by definition, this addresses a limited range of achievement and cannot provide indications of longer term effects.

7. Further evidence

7.1 TACTYC knows that a wider spectrum of studies on school entry issues exist and they should be taken into account. Other evidence, including some published in a review of research on age of starting school undertaken by the DfES in 2001, draws different conclusions from those quoted in the Rose Interim Report. The website: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013030/index.shtml> gives details, highlighting various difficulties associated with early entry to school, particularly for summer born children, many boys and children with special educational needs.

7.2 Crawford *et al.* (2007) analysed national assessment results and found that, although children who spent longer in the reception year (September start) did slightly better than those with less time in school (January or April start dates), these differences did not persist beyond KS1. The authors argue that more terms in high quality pre-school settings would be a better investment than annual entry to primary school.

7.3 These studies show a mixture of neutral and positive results for the impact of a greater length of schooling for summer-born children, but where a positive effect of longer schooling is found, it is usually short lived. The evidence suggests that it is bought at considerable cost to many children's confidence in themselves as learners and in their disposition to persevere at tasks.

8. Summer born children

8.1 The impact of early entry on summer born children is explored in a comprehensive paper addressing European policy and recent research on school starting age presented by Sharp (2002) to a Local Government Association seminar on 'When should our children start school?'

8.2 Payler and Whitebread (2008) maintain that what evidence there is suggests that extra terms spent in good quality nursery/preschool provision would be far more valuable than admitting summer born children to school when they are just four. They quote a considerable body of evidence, stretching back to at least the 1960s (e.g. Armstrong 1966; Bell and Daniels 1990) showing that summer-born children significantly under-achieve academically in relation to autumn born children. Payler and Whitebread suggest:

They are, for example, significantly over-represented amongst the children diagnosed with specific learning difficulties (Martin *et al.* 2004) and attending special schools (Bibby *et al.* 1996). The precise causes of this have been difficult to determine, but it is likely that the relative immaturity of summer born children in age-cohort classes is a significant factor. In one particular study, Daniels, Shorrocks-Taylor and Redfern (2000) saw teacher expectations of the youngest children in their classes as affecting the tasks that were given to children and the children's performance. They showed that summer born children's results in standard tests at the end of Key Stage One were not significantly affected by spending seven or nine terms at school because they remained the 'youngest' in their class. It is apparent, then, that simply putting children into the school system at an earlier age does not adequately tackle the issue.

... summer-born children, who are already disadvantaged in age-cohort classes, are now being doubly disadvantaged by being provided with significantly less pre-school education than other children.

However, as the Daniels *et al.* (2000) study has shown, this disadvantage cannot be simply compensated for by earlier school entry. So long as summer-born children remain in age-cohort classes, where they are always the youngest and least mature, they will not be able to benefit from the educational experiences provided as well as their older peers. Interestingly, there is current interest and a good deal of research looking at alternative grouping arrangements in schools. Gutierrez and Slavin (1992) showed quite a while ago, for example, that, given appropriate adaptations to pedagogy, non-graded elementary school programs in the USA, where children were flexibly grouped according to performance level rather than age, had clear positive impacts on student achievement. This is a position which has been recently supported by a group of cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists (Institute for the Future of the Mind 2006) advising the All Party Parliamentary Group for Scientific Research in Learning and Education chaired by Baroness Greenfield.

8.3 Current arrangements in most primary schools mean that children are mainly in year groups. Annual entry makes it both more necessary and more difficult for reception class teachers to offer the kind of responsive approach that helps young children to

flourish. It confounds logic that children should be taken out of effective nursery and pre-school settings and put into provision that is not able to meet their learning needs or match their developing abilities as effectively.

9. Boys

9.1 Sax (2006) and Spencer and Blades (2006) provide evidence that boys, who on average have a slower rate of maturation, show significant physical, physiological and neurological differences from girls which affect their response to early education. They need more opportunities for active movement than are generally available in reception classes. Sharp (1995) has found that a larger proportion of boys as well as summer born children were assessed as requiring extra support by reception class teachers, which in turn affected their expectations of children's later achievement.

10. Special Educational Needs

10.1 The findings on teacher expectations highlight a possible bias on the part of teachers against the less mature children in the age group. Gledhill *et al.* (2002), using data covering about 90% of British children, noted that despite being assessed as equivalent on objective measures, summer born children were significantly more likely than their older peers to be described by their teachers as having officially recognised learning difficulties. The researchers caution that children who have been misdiagnosed as having SEN could be at increased risk of subsequent academic failure, leading to lower self-esteem and possible emotional and behavioural difficulties. They conclude that, as about a third of children have a birthday in the summer term, there are significant implications for the academic attainment and the emotional well being of a large number of pupils. Sykes *et al.* (2009) comment that not only is there a greater than expected proportion of summer born children referred for SEN, but also that many of these children appear to have been misdiagnosed.

11. Cognitive and emotional development

11.1 Allen and Duncan-Smith (2008) have recently published a cross-party pamphlet on the importance of early intervention in addressing growing social problems. They distinguish between academic attainment and personal achievement, and are very clear about both the dangers of premature pressure at school and the value of high levels of investment in the personal and social development of young children and their families from the start.

To imagine that a central diktat pushing children into school when they are not ready is any way of helping the child exemplifies a 'one size fits all' mentality. (p.84)

11.2 Allen and Duncan-Smith acknowledge the operational obstacles to the proactive approach they champion: by their very nature, pre-emptive measures are outside the performance targets and measured results of individual service agencies. However, they point out that the countries that develop the individual first have higher academic scores than those which hot-house children. Quoting Felitti and Anda (2008), they emphasise that by ensuring that children succeed in their first years of school, they are using the paradigm most likely to be effective in dealing with the root causes of dysfunction.

12. International evidence

12.1 A survey by Stephen (2006) showed that the average age at which pupils in 20 countries started compulsory education was six. Her review of the international evidence suggests that:

There is no definitive evidence about the progress of children who start school at different ages, and international comparisons suggest that a later start appears not to disadvantage children...There is no compelling educational reason for beginning school at age five.

12.2 International evidence shows that children who start primary schooling up to two-or even three-years later, achieve as well as or better than children in England, particularly if they have had access to good early years provision.

12.3 Stephen identifies consensus on the following points:

- There is international recognition for early years as a distinct phase of education for children from about three to six years of age.
- Particular features of and expectations for early education will vary with cultural and socio-political conditions in society.
- There is widespread support for early years education as an intervention that can make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged children.
- There is evidence to suggest that early years education makes a difference to the cognitive and social/behavioural development of children and to some aspects of academic attainment and social behaviour in the first years of school.

There is no evidence to suggest that one curriculum is superior but there is widespread support for some features of early years education as crucial for children's learning:

- A holistic view of learning and the learner
- active or experiential learning
- respect for children's ability to be self-motivating and directing
- valuing responsive interactions between children and adults as crucial for learning.

Transition between any two phases of education poses challenges:

- Studies of transition suggest that there is a need to focus on matching provision with the needs of young learners rather than relying on general organisational changes.
- Children would benefit from more attention being paid to the way in which they are introduced to early years educational settings and to the state of their learning as they begin that phase.
- Continuing the early years pedagogical approach into primary school would allow new curriculum content to be introduced in ways that are both familiar and developmentally appropriate. This is likely to be particularly helpful for young learners for whom the responsive pedagogy typical of early years settings offers sensitive support for the challenges of primary education.
- There are likely to be considerable individual differences in cognitive and social development when children move to school but current ways of assessing 'readiness' are of limited validity and differentiating learning experiences within the new setting is more likely to be effective in facilitating learning.

- Age can be used as an eligibility criterion for the move to another institution but should not imply that the child is ready for curriculum changes or reduce the need to ensure developmentally appropriate educational provision.

12.4 Stephen's report points out that starting primary school a year later had no effect on children's development. She considers that the current drive to allow secondary school pupils to sit their exams earlier shows that there is room for greater flexibility within the education system.

12.5 Sykes et al (2009) highlight the following points in the summary of their findings on birthdate effects, which draw on international evidence:

- There are competing theories regarding birthdate effects. One is the 'length of schooling' hypothesis - when school admissions are staggered over the year then the youngest have the least schooling. Another is the 'relative age' hypothesis - even with the same length of schooling, the youngest in a year group will be, on average, less mature – cognitively, socially and emotionally – than their older classmates, leading to unequal competition in all 3 domains that could impact negatively on the younger group. Although it is sometimes difficult to disentangle these two hypotheses, evidence tends to support the latter.
Using a common start date does not solve the problem of this type of disadvantage (our italics)
- Teacher expectancy effects may contribute to birthdate effects – teachers may not take children's relative levels of maturity into account when making assessments of their ability and may therefore label younger children as less able than their older peers.
- Evidence from developmental psychology suggests that children between the ages of 4 and 5 may not be ready, developmentally, for formal education. Birthdate effects appear to be greatly reduced in countries where formal education begins at a later age. There needs to be a careful consideration of what is best for all children in the early years of schooling, based on solid evidence from psychological research. (p4)

13. Recommendation 10(ii) The DCSF should provide information for parents and local authorities about the optimum conditions and the benefits to children of entering reception class in the September immediately after their fourth birthday.

13.1 As shown above, TACTYC is clear that the benefits to children of entering reception class in the September immediately after their fourth birthday are highly questionable. Although already a common practice, this is often due to administrative and financial rather than educational or child-related considerations. In current circumstances, it exposes children to a learning environment which is rarely as suitable as that found in nurseries, particularly those in the maintained sector. For reception class environments to become suitable, a substantial and ongoing programme of education and development would be needed for heads as well as reception class teachers. Resources and provision would need to be nationally reviewed and new staffing ratios would need to be implemented.

13.2 Requirements that apply to primary schools, and the conditions and practice in many reception classes, are not compatible with the principles and commitments of the EYFS and it will take a big investment on the part of government as well as local

authorities to ensure that optimum conditions prevail. The quality of provision in reception classes must be considerably strengthened if children's well being and achievement are to be promoted rather than damaged.

14. Conditions in reception classes

14.1 A study by Adams *et al.* (2004) reveals the realities of what happens in reception classes and shows that there is much to do to ensure that children are given appropriate learning opportunities in line with the expectations of the EYFS.

14.2 Regulations currently allow staffing ratios to be as high as 1:30 in Reception, as against the regulatory minimum of 1:13 in maintained nursery settings and 1:8 for children of the same age in the non-maintained sector.

14.3 Many schools are not in the position to ensure that Reception and Key Stage 1 classes are taught by specialist Early Years teachers, and many heads and subject leaders have little conception or experience of early years pedagogy. There are serious implications here for training.

14.4 There is rarely sufficient space in reception classes to allow for children to engage in extended activities, especially outdoors. Resources and furniture are not always suitable and the timetable is often unduly constrained by the requirements of whole school assemblies and events as well as set playtimes. Mealtimes for the youngest children in school are rarely comfortable social occasions and access to toilets and cloakrooms can be daunting. Fisher (2009) points out in a forthcoming paper on transition from the EYFS into Key Stage 1 that teachers' concerns are not children's concerns; teachers talk of the curriculum and learning opportunities, but the children are far more preoccupied with friends, the playground and toilets. Many children will not access the curriculum effectively if they are anxious, and preoccupied with other things.

14.5 There is evidence to show that many reception class teachers are under pressure to deliver results, particularly for literacy, in ways which undermine the early years pedagogy which best supports young children's learning and that reception teachers do not understand how to deliver appropriate pedagogies (Broadhead 2004; Wood 1999; Cleave and Brown 1991; Bennett and Kell 1989). A current blog on the TES website 'I feel like I don't know what I'm doing anymore!' shows the confusion experienced by reception class teachers, and a widespread lack of understanding of early years pedagogy. Completing the EYFS Profile diverts teachers from effective ways of working with the children in their classes, and planning is often not flexible enough to allow for necessary but unpredictable consolidation as well as children's developing interests. One school has reported that places in its nurture group are now being taken up by pupils admitted earlier than previously to its reception class, who are not coping with the resultant stress, and there are many other anecdotal examples of similar difficulties coming from early years advisers, practitioners, school leaders and parents.

14.6 The proposal that entry for some children, for example the summer born and those with special educational needs, could be eased through the offer of part-time places, is not realistic for many children who are not yet mature enough for a full day in a school environment. Their entitlement to 15 hours of 'free childcare' per week from 2010, taken flexibly, is not compatible with a coherent developmental curriculum for a stable group of children. As Sykes notes:

In summary, this review has highlighted the robustness and persistence of birthdate effects and confirmed that they present potentially serious consequences for relatively young children that put them at a clear and long-term disadvantage in the educational system. Some theories from developmental psychology have been put forward that might help to explain these effects. If the aspiration of 'fairness for all children' in education is to be realised, the contribution of the developmental courses of cognitive and emotional abilities to birthdate effects needs closer investigation. (*ibid*, p.34)

14.7 In addition to the educational concerns, TACTYC believes that there are other issues that make annual entry to reception class problematic.

15. Need for daycare

15.1 Children from families who already rely on childcare for longer than 12.5 hours per week will not find it easy to manage part-time attendance. The adjustment required of children who would need to attend more than one setting in these circumstances is not helpful for them, and may not be financially viable for pre-schools or parents.

16. Difficulty of admitting large numbers of children into reception classes

16.1 Children attending new settings such as reception classes or nurseries need to be settled with care and sensitivity, and they can be better inducted in small numbers by their peers as well as staff. The knock-on effect on pre-schools of moving large numbers of children into reception is even more unsatisfactory, in that large groups of very young children must be introduced quickly to fill the spaces resulting from the annual loss of the cohort of children going to primary school.

17. Perspectives from pre-schools

17.1 From an early years point of view, TACTYC considers that the loss of older role models in nursery and pre-school settings disadvantages the younger children. It is even more difficult to settle a large cohort of younger children, and has significant training, staffing and financial implications in the private and voluntary sectors. It makes it difficult to attract parents to make a contribution as governors or members of a steering group when their child is not likely to attend for much more than a year.

18. Definition of the early years

18.1 Defining the age range of KS1 as 5-7 (as the *Rose Interim Report* does) may mislead parents as well as teachers into believing that children should be doing KS1 work once they reach the age of 5 years. Guidance for the *EYFS* compounds this, by describing the oldest group as 40-60+ months in age, glossing over the fact that the upper end of the age range in Reception can potentially be 71 months. TACTYC feels this is a feature that should be taken into account as part of the review of the *EYFS* as well as in the current primary review.

18.2 The early years phase has traditionally been seen as continuing to at least seven years, and was defined as up to eight in *The Children Act 1989*. Limiting it to the end of reception presents difficulties, not least because of the varying ages of children according to their date of birth. The *Rose* proposals for the structure of the curriculum around six areas of understanding would make it feasible to continue with the approach embodied in the *EYFS* until at least the end of Year 1, which would bring England into line with practice in other developed countries. Deferring the expectations of the contentious *Early Learning Goals* on reading and writing until KS1 would not prevent more able or experienced children from achieving them earlier, but would protect the majority who are

not currently reaching these goals from counter-productive pressures and the narrowing of their entitlement to the full *EYFS* curriculum.

19. Ways forward

19.1 TACTYC considers that it would be worth considering a model adopted in some schools before the advent of more rigid grouping associated with the introduction of the National Curriculum and testing. The summer-born pupils who were admitted at Easter were kept in Reception for another term as the core group who helped to settle the new intake of autumn born children. This gave them confidence by allowing them to be the more experienced members of a class and kept numbers within a reasonable and effective balance over the year. Transition between the reception and Year 1 classes was interpreted flexibly and supported through individualised teaching. TACTYC strongly believes that the kind of responsive planning that this approach demands would bring particular benefit for the late developers in the year group, especially boys, without disadvantaging older pupils. Coupled with adjustments in teacher training, it would remove many of the difficulties revealed in the NFER research commissioned by the DfES on the transition from Reception into Year 1 (Sanders *et al.* 2005).

19.2 Mixed age grouping still occurs in small schools and, as Payler and Whitebread (*ibid*) show, has a strong history of success where it has been well-planned. Cross-curricular work through topics or themes is already being adopted as an effective way of meeting the varied needs of a wide age range of children, which also helps pupils with special educational needs, including gifted or talented children. Judicious use of ICT can help to match levels of challenge to children's abilities.

19.3 TACTYC strongly believes that it is essential to ensure children receive their full entitlement to six terms of funded nursery education as this provides the most effective foundation for their later learning.

19.4 There are radical implications in these proposals for the initial training and education of teachers and their continuing professional development which will need to form part of the strategy for the development of the primary curriculum. TACTYC has responded accordingly to the Select Committee's current Inquiry into Initial Teacher Training.

20. Concerns

20.1 The introduction on p.12 of the *Rose Interim Report* suggests that work on the transition from EYFS to KS1, including provision for summer born children, is further forward than that on the design of the curriculum. TACTYC is very concerned about this statement as we consider that much evidence has not been taken into account on this specific issue, evidence which should also be considered in relation to the planned EYFS curriculum review before irreversible decisions are made.

20.2 Oates, in his introduction to Sykes (2009), warns that:

Although we believe that the existing research is illuminating in respect of the extent of the birthdate effect and of its causes...substantial, urgent work is required on the means of devising adequate approaches. From this review, and...comprehensive reviews of the quality of primary and early years education, it is likely that adequate remedy will lie in not only development of a strategy regarding when formal schooling should start, but also – at least – in respect of: specific balance in respect of curriculum elements devoted to cognitive, emotional and social development; the training requirements of teaching and support staff;

curriculum frameworks; inspection foci; pupil grouping strategy; management of differentiation; and the articulation between early years units and compulsory schooling. (*ibid*, p.4)

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