Design and Primary Education
Design Council

We are pleased to reprint, by permission of the Design Council, a selection of the recommendations from an important new report of the Council's Primary Education Working Party.

The role of design and design-related activities in the primary school
Design-related activities are important in the primary school because they enable children to understand the world, because they play an important part in children's intellectual and emotional development, and because they make an important contribution to children's work in all parts of the school curriculum.

Design-related activities in the primary school should not be thought of as a separate subject, but as something for which there are opportunities across the school curriculum.

The skills of designing and making are every bit as basic as those of literacy and numeracy.

Design-related activities in primary schools are beneficial in themselves and not simply as preparation for secondary school work.

Central and local government curriculum policies
Central government should continue to stress the importance of practical and aesthetic areas of learning in its statements upon the curriculum.

In drawing up curriculum policies, both central and local government should avoid appearing to associate 'design' in the primary school with one particular activity such as art, craft, or technology, but should stress its cross-curricular nature.

To this end, local education authorities should ensure that generalist primary advisers are fully involved in the preparation of any authority-wide policy dealing with design and design-related activities at primary level.

Consideration should be given to closer collaboration between the different parts of the advisory services and of HM Inspectorate concerned with design. The size and nature of advisory teams should be commensurate with the work to be undertaken.

How present practice might be improved
Children should be given the opportunity to plan classroom displays. The process of planning such displays should be regarded as equally important as the finished product.

Every opportunity should be given to children from an early age to study man-made and natural objects, arrangements, and environments and consider how they function.

Local education authorities and schools should try to build up circulating collections representative of contemporary art, craft, and design, for their schools.

Teachers of infant classes should consider whether they can offer children more opportunities for 'creative tinkering' with working objects.

Children should be encouraged, from the infant years, to draw from observation, and this activity should also give rise to thinking, questioning, and discussing.

Schools should plan to introduce children to a considered range of materials. They should consider the possibility of introducing young children to work involving rigid materials.

Work in science and technology in the primary school should be linked. Technology should be an integral part of the curriculum with a whole school strategy. Children's understanding of technology is best fostered when it is related to design.

Work in primary science and technology should give children the opportunity to plan and devise tests, experiments, and finished products for themselves.

Primary school technology should not put undue emphasis on the finished product, but should nonetheless give children the opportunity to produce work giving aesthetic and functional satisfaction.

In middle schools, specialist teachers of practical and aesthetic subjects should introduce generalist teachers to the use of specialist facilities. Specialists and generalists should exchange views and experience and work together in drawing up a strategy for design-related activities which all staff can implement.

More attention must be paid to continuity between different phases of education. The possibility of joint exhibitions and exchanges of work, as well as the development of record-keeping in primary schools, should be explored.

Local authorities, SATROs, and others should examine the scope for increasing fairs, exhibitions, and competitions in design-related activities.

Any competitions for primary school children should put the emphasis on taking part as much as on winning, and there must be an intensive effort to feed their outcomes back into the system.

Schools should be encouraged to involve individuals from outside the school, such as artists, craftsmen, architects, designers, local firms and industry, parents, etc, on both a long- and short-term basis.

Registers of such individuals available should be maintained by appropriate bodies and publicised to schools.

Initial education
Students specialising in subjects such as art and craft, science, or technology in their initial training must be given the opportunity to consider and practise the design-related aspects of these subjects, and their linkage with other areas of the curriculum, and their contribution to the development of the young child. Any increase in subject specialisation on initial training courses must not inhibit this.

Professional courses must be devised which allow student teachers not specialising in the above areas to understand the contribution of design-related activities to the development of the young child, and to acquire sufficient practical and organisational competence to handle design-related activities including those stemming from art, craft, science and technology in the primary classroom. Pressures to increase subject specialisation should not inhibit this.

Institutions offering initial training should incorporate into their initial courses experience gained from any involvement in design-related in-service training courses.

In-service training
In-service training must build on existing skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of primary teachers. A 'task force' approach may be particularly useful.

In-service training must explain the importance of design-related activities,

and not simply give practical instruction.

Primary advisers and subject advisers should be involved in local authority in-service programmes for design-related activities, and links must be made with other curricular areas.

In-service courses must offer support to schools in building up a whole school, cross-curricular approach.

Outside agencies and individuals should be invited to contribute to in-service training as part of a planned strategy, rather than as a one-off contribution.

When allocating Educational Support Grant monies for in-service training in primary science and technology, government should give priority to schemes which will stress the design aspect of these activities.

Resources and accommodation

School capitation allowances should enable schools to use a variety of materials in design-related activities, including materials of quality.

There should be an examination by the British Educational Equipment Association, local education authorities, and schools of the material needs for an effective programme of design-related activities in primary schools.

Local education authorities should actively explore with heads the use of surplus classroom space, arising from falling rolls, for practical activities.

Local education authorities should explore the possibility of adapting old primary school buildings to make them more suitable for design-related activities.

In middle schools, the aim should be to adapt accommodation to form design centres, embracing different disciplines.

Assessment and record-keeping

Schools should keep some records of pupils' achievements and progress, in order to communicate with parents, to help pupils, and to evaluate their own strategy and approach.

Teachers should keep a record of the types of activity which they have undertaken. Such records should be kept in reasonably consistent form throughout a single school.

Such records should note how children have reacted to different activities, and the stimulus which these have provided. Any evaluation should focus on the quality of experience provided to children, not simply on a physical product.

Teachers should consider building up profiles of pupils' achievements and progress, and devise a list of suitable questions as a starting point.

Assessment of pupils should not discourage innovation, imagination and creativity.