

The National Association for Primary Education

NAPE and the Primary Sector:

A Follow-up (2019)

This paper reviews the association's engagement with the profession as a follow-up to the wide-ranging and illuminating paper written by John Coe in 2013 (on NAPE Website). Much has changed since then and this paper attempts to capture the current scene, nearly six years later

The overall picture is in many respects a gloomy one inasmuch as the prevailing political winds have been blowing in directions far removed from the central values of the association. In particular, high stakes testing in the primary years have had a restrictive impact on curriculum development, undermining teacher morale and having serious implications for pupil wellbeing. Some schools may have weathered the storm with their principles intact, holding on to a vision of education which is rooted in a deep commitment to and respect for children's individuality and a concept of the curriculum which is not narrowly conceived but rich in its embrace of depth and breadth in learning experience. But as Alexander (2016) argued at the last major event organised by the Cambridge Review Trust, too much central policy-making in recent decades has been at the mercy of political whims and obsessions, rather than systematically shaped in the light of educational research and professional dialogue. Thus, the current climate, as defined by central directives may be antithetical to the key interests of NAPE and, we would argue, the profession as a whole, but one cannot question the importance of the association's continuing role in voicing its concerns and contributing to educational dialogue.

The following are perceived as some of the key areas where NAPE has made its presence felt in the wider educational community:

1. NAPE has maintained a strong presence in the **Primary Umbrella Group**, a forum for union and professional association representatives to come together to share perspectives and initiatives and from time to time engaging in dialogue with policy-makers. Recently NAPE has played a key role in reconvening the Group after a nine month period without a meeting and this co-ordinating role is likely to continue. NAPE is represented on a range of other organisations/forums, including **Early Education, TACTYC, National Primary Teacher Education Council and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Teaching Profession**. Links have been established with the newly formed **Chartered College of Teachers** and we had a stall at their first national conference in 2018. NAPE has also been a staunch supporter of the **More Than a Score Campaign (MTAS)**, questioning the testing regime cumulatively implemented by successive governments.
2. The most prominent vehicle for communication with the profession has been the journal, **Primary First**, now more accessible through its on-line version and it continues to successfully combine articles by classroom practitioners with

contributions from distinguished educationists in a format that is visually appealing as well as informative. For a number of editions, there was a close collaboration with the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE), which was welcomed for both professional and financial reasons, but this has now come to a halt, with ASPE withdrawing from the arrangement.

3. NAPE's interface with the wider educational community can only be strengthened through the initiatives being taken by Mark Taylor on the social media front. We are delighted to be sponsoring the **Education on Fire Podcasts** and see this as a way of reaching new audiences. While the Association's website has been extended over the years, its potential is still to be realised and this is a key area for attention in the coming months.
4. A major achievement for NAPE in the last three years has been its leadership of the **Keycolab Project**, an ERASMUS funded project, involving close collaboration with colleagues from Spain, Romania, Germany, Finland as well as UK, with a focus on the integration of *key competences* in the primary classroom. This venture into the world of European projects was challenging in its demands and the team involved are to be complimented on their contribution to European dialogue, as we move inexorably towards *Brexit*. We have been approached with regard to a supporting role in another European funded project on Independent Learning and one hopes that this collaboration will bear some fruit for all parties concerned.
5. We continue to be approached by **the media** for our views on matters of educational interest and our Information Officer is the key conduit for maintaining this link with the general public.

On the debit side, NAPE's membership has been falling over the years, as the original membership in the 1980s and 1990s retire, and while this has been counterbalanced by a much stronger on-line presence, this has not resulted as yet in additional income for the Association. Although the last Schiller lecture in April 2018 at the University of Greenwich attracted a fair sized audience, the Association has not been active on the staff development front in recent years with conferences or other events. This represents a major challenge for the Association in the years ahead.

Since 1986 the SE London branch of NAPE, based on a strong partnership between the University of Greenwich and local teachers across ITE several local authorities has been very active in its promotion of conferences, concerts and other events, but this has now had to close its doors with the retirement of its leadership. 30 years of active engagement with educational discourse is no mean achievement for a local association and countless students in ITE would have benefitted from this access to an additional source of professional enrichment. Fortunately the Oxfordshire branch of NAPE is still going strong and its annual Festival of Voices, extending over several days, continues to attract substantial support from Oxfordshire primary schools and maintains high standards of performance in the distinctive Dorchester Abbey setting.

In summary, contextual factors bound up with the prevailing political ethos, reduced funding for schools, increasing pressures on teacher time and morale, have all worked against NAPE's engagement with the primary sector. But despite this, NAPE continues to maintain its vocal profile in the profession alongside other organisations and to play a critical but constructive role in educational debate, responding to government initiatives, when appropriate, and keeping alive those enlightened values which have permeated primary education at its best.

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