



Department
for Education

The curriculum programme pilot: early findings

Research brief

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CooperGibson Research

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1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Background

As part of the Curriculum Fund, the Department for Education launched the curriculum programme pilot in July 2018. The aim of the pilot is to understand the benefits that complete curriculum programmes can have in reducing unnecessary teacher workload and improving pupil outcomes, and how they can be most effectively shared and implemented in other schools. Complete curriculum programmes are complete packages of resources that teachers need to deliver a national curriculum subject across a key stage. They include a long-term plan, with content and knowledge sequenced carefully, as well as all the resources and training required for teachers to deliver individual lessons. The curriculum programmes have also been designed to be knowledge-rich, and have teacher-led instruction and whole-class teaching approaches at their core.

As a condition of the application to the curriculum programme pilot, each applying school was required to recruit a minimum of six participating schools in which to test their curriculum programmes. Each lead school was required to meet specific criteria set out in the grant specification to ensure a diversity of participating schools in terms of disadvantage catchment and Ofsted inspection grade. Schools were able to pilot more than one programme in different subjects and/or key stages.

Overall, 11 lead schools successfully applied to run two-term pilots, with seven being funded from January 2019 and four from April 2019¹. Details of the programme specification and lead schools can be found [here](#).

A total of 74 participating schools implemented the curriculum programmes in their teaching between January and July 2019. The programmes piloted were history and geography at key stage 2 and history, geography and science at key stage 3. The majority of lead schools piloted one curriculum programme with a small number piloting two or three programmes.

1.2 Terminology

This research brief refers throughout to lead schools and participating schools. Lead schools are those which designed and developed complete curriculum programmes in their own schools and subsequently shared the programmes with other schools.

¹ In two of the April start lead schools delivery of the curriculum programmes in participating schools was delayed until September 2019.

Participating schools are those which the lead schools' partner with and which pilot the curriculum programmes as a new approach in their schools.

The research specifically targeted those with key roles within the delivery and implementation of the complete curriculum programmes in both lead and participating schools. The following roles are referred to throughout this brief:

- **Project leads** (shortened to "leads") – staff in the lead school team providing support to participating school staff.
- **Participating school co-ordinators** (shortened to "co-ordinators") – the key person in a participating school who liaises and co-ordinates with the project lead in the lead school and teachers in their own school. They may also be trialling the materials in their class or classes.
- **Participating teachers** (shortened to "teachers") – the teachers in the participating schools trialling the materials in their class or classes.

2. Aims and objectives of the research

CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned to conduct the research, which aimed to understand the benefits that complete curriculum programmes have, including whether they can improve pupil outcomes and reduce teacher workload and how they can be effectively shared and implemented between a wide range of schools. The specific objectives were to:

- Investigate pedagogical fidelity in how complete curriculum programmes are taught in participant schools and what factors affect this.
- Investigate which implementation models for complete curriculum programmes work best, in which contexts and identify any barriers to implementation.
- Investigate how useful teachers find the curriculum programme materials and the reasons for this.
- Investigate how teachers perceive the current and future implications for both teacher workload, and pupil progress and engagement.

3. Methodology

A mixed-method design was used for the research, to explore implementation, benefits and perceived impact of the pilots.

This involved:

- **Baseline and follow-up online surveys** with project leads, participating school co-ordinators and participating school teachers.
- **Baseline and follow-up depth interviews** with project leads, participating school co-ordinators and participating school teachers.
- **Focus groups** with participating school teachers.

Data collection was staggered to account for differences in delivery start dates across the lead schools and their participating schools.

This research brief summarises analysis of the baseline surveys and interviews of leads, co-ordinators and teachers at lead and participating schools. A breakdown of the baseline sample is set out in Table 1, while Tables 2 and 3 provide a breakdown of responses across the curriculum programmes being piloted.

Table 1: Survey and interview sample breakdown

Respondent groups	Number of survey responses	Number of interviewees
Participating school co-ordinators	41	17
Participating school teachers	121	21
Lead school project leads	9	9
Total	171	48

Table 2: Baseline survey responses (by curriculum programme)**Table 2a: Participating school teachers**

Curriculum programme	Number of mentions ²	% of mentions
Science KS3	53	44%
History KS2	12	10%
History KS3	20	17%
Geography KS2	31	26%
Geography KS3	15	12%

Table 2b: Participating school co-ordinators

Curriculum programme	Number of mentions	% of mentions
Science KS3	21	51%
History KS2	3	7%
History KS3	12	29%
Geography KS2	4	10%
Geography KS3	7	17%

Table 2c: Lead school project leads

Curriculum programme	Number of mentions
Science KS3	4
History KS2	3
History KS3	2
Geography KS2	3
Geography KS3	2

² Respondents were sometimes involved in more than one curriculum programme and were therefore asked questions on all of these programmes. As such 'mentions' refers to the number of responses to the questions on each specific curriculum programme.

Table 3: Baseline telephone interviews (by curriculum programme)

Curriculum programme	Participating school co-ordinators	Participating school teachers	Lead school project leads
Science KS3	6	4	2
History KS2	2	2	2
History KS3	6	6	2
Geography KS2	4	9	3
Total	18	21	9

There are three important methodological considerations to note when considering the findings provided in this research brief.

- *Timescales for delivery:* Schools started programme delivery at different times, with seven starting in January or February, two in April and two in September 2019. Fieldwork was planned to ensure that delivery had begun before the baseline survey and interviews. However, this was difficult to achieve in practice as schools varied in when they began delivery. Some schools had not started regularly teaching with the materials at the point of completing the baseline survey.
- *Perceptions over time:* Reported perceptions may shift over time as the programmes become more firmly embedded in the school settings. As the pilot progresses, later stages of this research will seek to capture these developing perceptions and the reported impacts of the programmes.
- *Prior programme experience:* Some participating schools had been using the programme materials prior to commencement of the pilot. The extent of this varied, therefore it is likely that baseline measures have been affected by this prior experience and may not fully represent early implementation.

4. Key findings

This section provides the high-level findings from the baseline research.

4.1 Summary

At the point that the baseline research was conducted (March – June 2019), most teachers had started trialling the curriculum programme materials in their teaching with almost three-quarters (73%, n=93) stating that they were using all or most of the resources that had been provided by lead schools. These included lesson materials, schemes of work, assessment materials and training. Participating school engagement with the programmes was good.

Adaptation of the materials/resources by participating schools was common, and expected by the majority of lead schools as part of the process of testing and acting on feedback to refine the curriculum programmes. However, there was some initial uncertainty amongst lead schools around how they could encourage participating schools to engage with the teacher-led and whole-class teaching elements of the programme.

Over three quarters (76%, n=92) of teachers had received some form of training by the time of the baseline survey. Teachers rated face-to-face training as the most useful form of support they had been given (29%, n=25). The interviews identified that teachers and co-ordinators most valued the opportunity to observe practice at the lead schools and one-to-one support.

The majority of co-ordinators rated the quality of support as excellent (66%, n=27); or good (29%, n=12). However, almost one quarter of teachers (24%, n=29) had not received any training or support related to the programme. This lack of training or support was identified as a potential barrier to maximising the impact of the pilot.

A number of benefits and challenges were identified by teachers. The programmes were reported to be helping to reduce teacher workload, particularly in terms of planning time and in the identification and creation of resources. Other benefits included the provision of high-quality resources and a knowledge rich approach which gave pupils exposure to a higher level of subject-knowledge, leading to better knowledge retention.

The timing of the curriculum programme pilot had been the main challenge for lead schools, leading to short timescales for the recruitment of participating schools and providing timely training and support prior to commencing delivery. Teachers identified the key challenges as adapting to a new way of teaching and adapting resources to ensure accessibility for all pupils. Around one-fifth (21%, n=19) of teachers felt that pupil engagement was a challenge although conversely increased pupil engagement was also reported in some qualitative interviews.

The potential for the pilots to have a positive impact on schools in a range of areas was supported by participating school co-ordinators and teachers. Both groups were positive about the potential impact of the pilot on reducing the complexity of planning (teachers 79%, n=95, co-ordinators 93%, n=38), teacher workload (teachers 72%, n=87, co-ordinators 88%, n=36) and effective implementation of the curriculum (teachers 70%, n=85, co-ordinators 90%, n=37). Both the project leads and participating school co-ordinators were typically more positive than teachers.

In addition to potential impact, the research also highlighted some impacts already emerging. Almost half (46%, n=55) of teachers said that their workload had decreased since being involved in the pilot. Findings from the qualitative interviews highlighted that using the resources had saved teachers' time in planning, identifying and creating resources. Some teachers also reported improved learner outcomes, positive pupil engagement and raised pupil aspirations.

4.2 Design and initial involvement

In the main, lead schools had developed the curriculum programmes in-house using the expertise of staff, informed by the relevant national curriculum programmes of study to establish what the content should include. This included mapping the curriculum back from subsequent key stages e.g. working backwards from GCSE specifications to develop key stage 3 curriculum content. The curriculum programmes themselves were predominantly complete and in use in the lead schools prior to the pilot commencing, although some material was newly prepared.

Participating schools' decisions to be involved in the pilot were generally driven by wanting to improve subject teaching and develop their curriculum. It provided these schools with the opportunity to develop subject knowledge and teaching practice to support the focus on creating a broad and balanced curriculum in the new Ofsted inspection framework that was due to be introduced in September 2019. Other factors driving decisions to participate included enabling clear progression of pupils between key stages or phases of education and reducing teacher workload.

Most lead schools had found recruitment of participating schools straight-forward and had usually done this through contacting potential schools directly. It was common for participating schools to have worked with the lead schools previously; over one-third (34%, n=27) of co-ordinators having worked in partnership with their lead school previously. Thus, the pilot served to deepen those existing relationships.

Initial concerns about being involved in the pilot from both lead and participating schools were around the logistics of delivery. Timing was the most common concern raised by teachers and co-ordinators and the potential impact on having to change teaching and

approaches mid-way through the academic year. Later schools joining the pilot will do so from the beginning of the academic year and any effects of the different start times will be examined in subsequent research reports.

4.3 Implementation

4.3.1 Provision of resources

Lead schools provided a range of resources, schemes of work, lesson materials, assessment materials and training to participating schools.

At the point that the baseline research was conducted (March – June 2019), most teachers had started trialling the curriculum programme materials in their teaching with almost three-quarters (73%, n=93) stating that they were using all or most of the resources that had been provided.

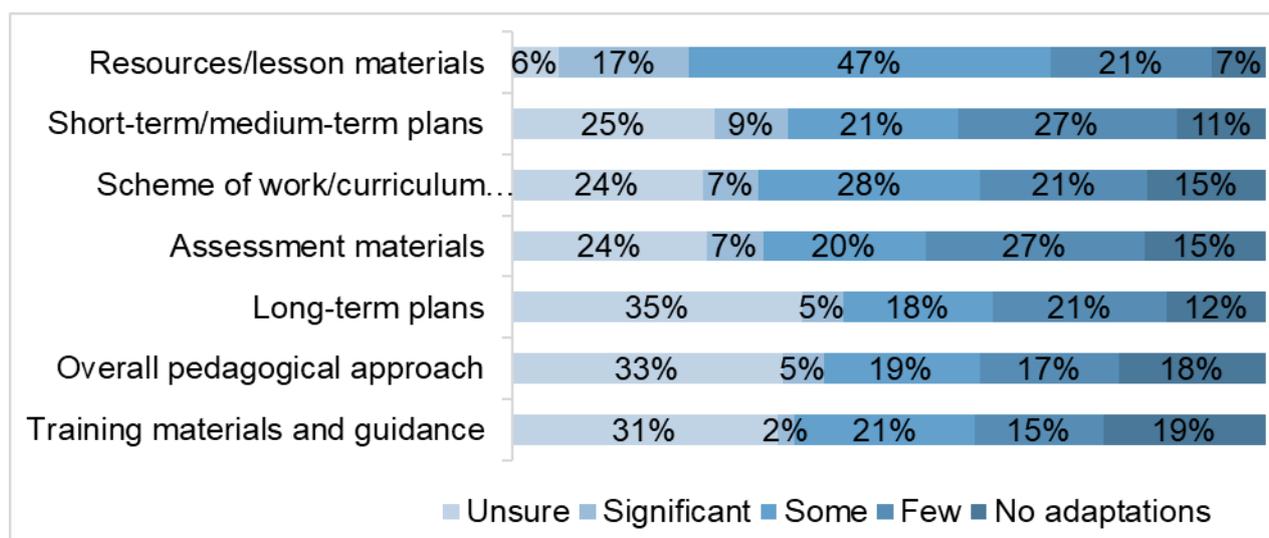
Teacher engagement with the curriculum programmes was good overall according to lead schools and co-ordinators, particularly in relation to engagement with the resources, training materials and guidance and adherence to the overall pedagogical approach. However, at this early stage, there was more uncertainty amongst lead schools as to how participating schools were engaging with the teacher-led, whole-class teaching elements of the programme and with assessment materials.

4.3.2 Adaptation

Adaptation of the resources by participating schools was common, and expected by the majority of lead schools. However, there was some evidence to suggest that the amount of adaptations made by participating schools was greater than expected by lead schools.

As shown in Figure 1, teachers were most likely to adapt lesson materials when compared to other elements of the programme (85% adapted, n=111), and this was the element of the programmes that was most likely to have been adapted significantly (28%, n=22%). Over half of participating school teachers had adapted the short-term plans (57% adapted, n=75) and scheme of work (56% adapted, n=74), to make sure that the flow or content of units aligned with the topics that they had originally planned to teach.

Figure 1: How much are you adapting or will you adapt the following in your teaching? (participating school teachers)



Base: participating school teachers: science key stage 3=53; history key stage 2=13, history key stage 3=19, geography key stage 2=32, geography key stage 3=14

Insights gathered from the qualitative interviews suggest that factors driving adaptations included:

- Differentiation to stretch higher-ability pupils or to provide scaffolding contents for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or English as an additional language (EAL).
- Additional help sheets and teacher guides to clarify elements of the materials.
- Editing and correcting content, grammar and spelling errors.

4.4 Support and training

Over three quarters (76%, n=92) of teachers had received some form of training by the time of the baseline survey. Schools had commonly received training on the pedagogical rationale, how to use the teaching resources and how to use assessment materials (see Table 4 below). Training or support on teacher-led instruction (34%, n=41), whole-class teaching (33%, n=40) and subject knowledge (29%, n=35) was less common, although requests for more support in relation to what direct instruction looks like were made during the telephone interviews. This included training videos of lead school staff using lesson resources, in order to demonstrate pedagogical approaches.

In the baseline survey, teachers rated face-to-face training as the most useful form of support they had been given (29%, n=25), followed by lead staff visits to participating schools (24%, n=20) and teacher/co-ordinator visits to lead schools (22%, n=19). The

interviews identified that teachers and co-ordinators most valued the opportunity to observe practice at the lead schools and one-to-one support.

Table 4: Have you received any support or training from the lead school on any of the following aspects of the programme? (participating school teachers)

Focus of training	% of teachers received (Base 121)	% most useful (Base 92)
How to use the teaching resources in the classroom	65%	37%
Pedagogical rationale (i.e. knowledge-rich approach)	55%	25%
How to use the assessment materials in the classroom	41%	8%
Teacher-led instruction	34%	5%
Whole-class teaching	33%	3%
Subject knowledge	29%	14%
Other	6%	8%
I've not received any training or support	24%	-

Base: 121 participating school teachers

Satisfaction with the quality of support provided by the lead school was high. The majority of co-ordinators rated the quality of support as excellent (66%, n=27); or good (29%, n=12). The approachable and supportive nature of the lead schools' relationship with participating schools was particularly valued. Several interviewees from participating schools emphasised that the lead school was open to ideas and suggestions, as well as being responsive to the needs of staff.

However, almost one quarter of teachers (24%, n=29) had not received any training or support related to the programme. Reasons included capacity and staffing issues, or training being attended by other staff members and not being cascaded as intended. Lack of training or support was identified as a potential barrier to maximising the impact of the pilot.

Participating teachers who had not received any training or support were less likely to report in the survey that they were happy with the pedagogical approach and its suitability for their pupils. They were also less likely to believe the programme would have a positive impact on their subject knowledge or improve whole-class teaching, and their job satisfaction was more likely to have decreased compared to staff who had received

training or support. This underlines the importance of teachers being able to take part in training about curriculum programmes to ensure potential improvements are realised.

4.5 Benefits and challenges

The baseline survey and interviews were designed primarily to explore set-up and implementation of the curriculum programmes and this section focuses specifically on the benefits and challenges that schools reported during this process.

4.5.1 Benefits

The curriculum programmes were reported to be helping to reduce teacher workload, particularly in terms of planning time and in the identification and creation of resources (see Section 4.6.2 for further details).

Other benefits of the programme included the provision of high-quality resources which were reported to be well-written and included challenging knowledge and vocabulary that supported pupils' development. Clear curriculum links were cited as a benefit, with nearly half of interviewees commenting that the programmes had supported transition through topics, embedding key concepts for pupils at an earlier stage than had happened previously. The knowledge-rich approach of the programmes was also identified as a benefit which gave pupils exposure to a higher level of subject-knowledge, leading to better retention of knowledge.

4.5.2 Challenges

The timing of the pilot had been the main challenge for lead schools, leading to short-timescales for the recruitment of participating schools and providing timely training and support prior to commencing delivery. Timing was also a key concern raised by participating schools due to the impact on having to change teaching and approaches mid-way through the academic year. This was reflected in the survey where adapting to a new way of teaching was the most frequently cited challenge (29%, n=27) by participating school teachers.

The need to adapt resources was also a challenge for some participating schools, particularly around the need to make adaptations to ensure they were accessible to pupils of all abilities. Those receiving one-to-one support particularly valued the help they received in planning lessons, including differentiation.

Around one-fifth (21%, n=19) of teachers felt that pupil engagement was a challenge. During the interviews participating schools, particularly secondary schools, reported some challenges in engaging pupils where there was resistance to the change in learning approach. Text-heavy resources with a focus on reading comprehension were felt to be a

challenge for keeping pupils fully engaged. Accessibility for lower-ability pupils was also reported to be an issue for some. Conversely in the qualitative interviews some teachers reported positive pupil engagement with the programmes (see Section 4.6.2 for further details).

4.6 Impact and outcomes

Leads, co-ordinators and teachers were asked briefly about the potential for experiencing any change and impact as a result of engagement in the pilots. This section provides an overview of what they felt the potential impact would be and any emerging impact they had experienced to date. Survey questions about potential impact covered a wide range of areas including teacher workload, lesson planning and content, quality of teaching and learning, teacher knowledge, pupil attainment and engagement. Survey questions about emerging impact were limited to aspects of the teacher's role such as workload, job satisfaction and well-being. No survey questions were asked about emerging impacts on pupil outcomes given the early stage of implementation, however, some references were made to this by teachers during the qualitative interviews and this is summarised in section 4.6.2.

4.6.1 Potential impact

The potential for the pilots to have a positive impact on schools in a range of areas was supported by leads, co-ordinators and teachers.

Participating school co-ordinators and teachers were positive about the potential impact of the pilot on reducing the complexity of planning (teachers 79%, n=95, co-ordinators 93%, n=38), teacher workload (teachers 72%, n=87, co-ordinators 88%, n=36) and effective implementation of the curriculum (teachers 70%, n=85, co-ordinators 90%, n=37). This was reflected qualitatively with over half of those interviewed anticipating that the pilots would reduce teacher workload around the planning of lessons and creation of resources.

Most participating school co-ordinators agreed that the pilot would have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning (93%, n=38). The teachers themselves were less certain, with three out of five (60%, n=73) agreeing that the pilot would impact positively on the quality of teaching and learning. During the interviews with co-ordinators and teachers, it was felt that the curriculum programme had the potential to positively impact on teacher knowledge, their understanding, ability to adopt different pedagogical approaches and more effective questioning and explanation.

Similarly, almost nine out of ten (88%, n=36) co-ordinators believed the pilot would have a positive impact on pupil attainment, whereas just over three out of five teachers agreed

(63%, n=76). This was also a common theme amongst interviewees (leads, co-ordinators and teachers) who felt there would be a positive effect on learner attainment and outcomes, with some reporting that they were already seeing improvements in work produced, writing, vocabulary skills and knowledge retention.

4.6.2 Emerging impact

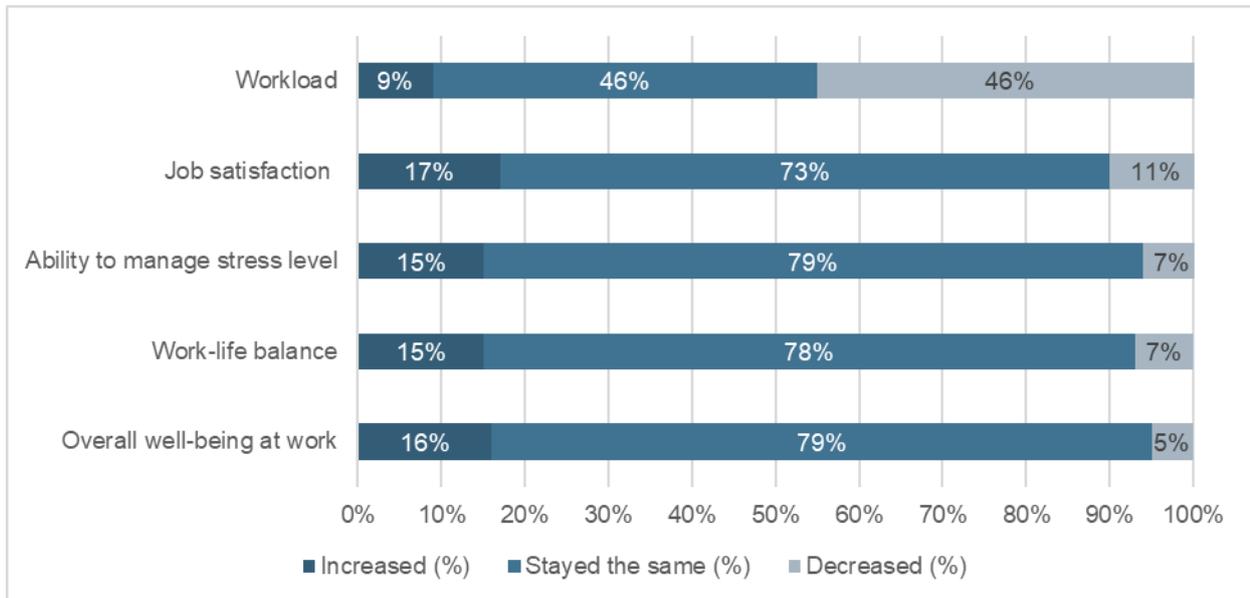
Overall, there has been a strong positive reported impact on teacher workload, even at this early stage in the pilot when the resources had only been in use for a short period in most schools (see Figure 2). Almost half (46% n=55) of participating school teachers said that their workload had decreased since being involved in the curriculum pilot, whilst the same proportion said there has been no change. Less than one in ten teachers (9%, n=11) said their workload had increased. These were all secondary teachers (15% of secondary teachers) and all but one were piloting key stage 3 programmes.

Teachers and co-ordinators in secondary schools (and some in primary schools) strongly reported that the curriculum programmes had had a positive effect on their workload. They highlighted that using the resources had saved them time in planning, identifying and creating resources. Although delivery of the curriculum programme still required planning, teachers in participating schools said that this was being spent on developing their own background knowledge, carrying out research or tweaking resources to meet needs rather than building lessons from scratch.

Impact on other areas of their working life is more limited at this stage. Most participating school teachers said there has been no change in their overall wellbeing at work, ability to manage stress levels, work-life balance or job satisfaction. A minority of teachers felt there had been an increase or decrease in these aspects of their job (see Figure 2).

Teachers piloting key stage 3 programmes were significantly more likely to say that their job satisfaction had decreased (15%, n=13) since being involved in the pilot compared to teachers piloting key stage 2 programmes (5%, n=2). Furthermore, the small proportion teachers who reported a decrease in overall wellbeing at work (7%, n=6) were all piloting key stage 3 programmes.

Figure 2: Since being involved in the curriculum pilot, would you say that the following aspects of your job have increased, decreased or stayed the same? (participating school teachers)



Base: 121 participating school teachers

Themes relating to pupil outcomes also emerged from the qualitative interviews with teachers. Some teachers suggested that they had already seen improvements in pupils' writing, vocabulary and knowledge retention in the early stages of implementation. Others who hadn't yet seen improvements suggested that pupils would learn to adjust to more knowledge-rich, academic approaches to teaching and learning.

Interviewees reported that some pupils had showed increased enthusiasm and enjoyment for the subjects and were engaged with using the resources produced. Improved behaviour for learning was also reported in some instances.

Interviewees from both lead and participating schools commented on how the curriculum stretched pupils by introducing them to higher level content, enabling them to understand and apply more complex terminology and deeper knowledge, much earlier than they previously would have been able to do.

5. Next steps

Due to the positive nature of the early research findings and the desire of schools to continue piloting the programmes, the Department for Education has granted extensions to the delivery plans for nine of the eleven lead schools piloting complete curriculum programmes. This means that programme delivery will continue into the academic year 2019/20 and will provide a greater insight into the effects of implementing a complete curriculum programme over the longer term. To ensure that the Department is maximising the learning from this pilot, the evaluative research will also be extended. The following research outputs are planned:

- Spring 2020 – A detailed report covering findings from the baseline and follow-up research covering all schools that participated in the original pilot.
- Winter 2020 – An extension report focusing primarily on longer term outcomes for those schools which applied to extend their delivery plans beyond the original pilot timescales into the academic year 2020.



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