

Leading historians back reforms to history curriculum

A group of eminent historians including David Starkey and Niall Ferguson has backed Education Secretary Michael Gove's plans to reform the history curriculum.



The Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Normans winning the Battle of Hastings in 1066 Photo: Alamy

By Alice Philipson

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Some 15 historians gave their backing to Mr Gove's proposals which will see schools teach more facts and events to ensure children develop what the Education Secretary calls a "connected narrative" of history.

They wrote in the Times: "While these proposals will no doubt be adapted as a result of full consultation, the essential idea ... is a welcome one."

The new curriculum will see children taught, in chronological order, about key figures in British history that were dropped from the syllabus by the last Labour Government.

Pupils will learn about events including the including the Norman Conquest, Henry II's dispute with Thomas Becket, the Black Death, the Wars of the Roses, and execution of Charles I, the

union with Scotland and the rise and fall of the British Empire.

However, the plans have provoked criticism from several groups, including history teachers who concluded the proposals were "arbitrary and even bizarre" when questioned by the Historical Association.

The letter reads: "We are in no doubt that the proposed changes to the curriculum will provoke controversy among those attached to the status quo and suspicious of change.

"Yet we must not shy away from this golden opportunity to place history back at the centre of the national curriculum.

"Above all, we recognise that a coherent curriculum that reflects how events and topics relate to one another over time, together with a renewed focus in primary school for history, has long been needed."

Other critics of the proposals include Sir Richard Evans, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, who said the plans would restore "rote learning of the patriotic stocking-fillers so beloved of traditionalists."

However the letter said the reforms were a "golden opportunity" to place history back at the centre of learning.

Other signatories of the letter include Simon Sebag Montefiore, Amanda Foreman, Chris Skidmore and Antony Beevor.