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Government may bring back old-fashioned primary school teaching

BY **RICHARD GARNER**, **EDUCATION EDITOR** | Tuesday 09 November 2010



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A return to traditional old-fashioned primary schooling of the 1950's could be on the cards as a result of the Coalition Government's education reforms, according to the head of a major review of the primary schooling.

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Professor Robin Alexander, from Cambridge University - who produced the most comprehensive review of the primary curriculum. spoke at the weekend about how the Government's proposed review had produced "darker rumours of a return to the 1950's".

Speaking on the anniversary of the publication of his report, he said he and his team had "three particular worries about what lies ahead".

He said that Education Secretary Michael Gove's comments that the national curriculum should give a minimum entitlement to all pupils



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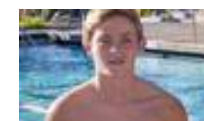
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could "consolidate the gap between the so-called 'basics' and the wider curriculum, adding that "misplaced nostalgia" for a bygone era could prevent schools from tackling the major issues of "today's uncertain but perilous world" - such as social change and cultural issues.

The new revamped curriculum could leave schools with the task of just tackling the three R's and little else, Professor Alexander, giving the annual Brian Simon lecture at London University's Institute of Education, warned at the weekend.

"A 'minimum entitlement' can reduce the detail which is specified for each aspect of the curriculum but it should not reduce the curriculum's overall scope," he said.

Mr Gove has already set up a review of the national curriculum tests for 11-year-olds and intends to announce further details of his plans for the primary curriculum in a White Paper to be published later this month.

Labour's proposals - set out in a review by former Ofsted inspector Sir Jim Rose and including compulsory language lessons for all children from the age of seven - were scrapped by the new Government on gaining power.

He urged ministers to ditch the standpoint of the previous Government - which had stridently insisted "like Margaret Thatcher that There Is No Alternative" to the current testing regime.

However, he urged teachers and academics: "Let's contribute to the Government's assessment review, not prejudice it."

Professor Alexander spoke of his fears that the Government could

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embark upon a return to more selection in secondary schooling.

At a meeting in the House of Commons of the Friends of Grammar School, Mr Gove had said his foot was "hovering over the pedal" of more selection but that he would have to see what his co-driver, Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg would have to say.

"If selective secondary education returns to the agenda, primary school streaming won't be far behind." he added.

In the 1950's, before the introduction of comprehensive education, streaming had been introduced for seven-year-olds to prepare them for a two-tier secondary education system and had "intensified social inequalities and for too many children became a self-fulfilling prophecy which suppressed their true potential".


Under Labour, ministers had argued against streaming - which puts pupils in the same stream for every subject in favour of setting which allows them into top sets for the subjects they excel in but other sets for areas in which they do less well.

Professor Alexander also had warning about the Government's drive to create more academies and new "free" schools - run by parents, teachers and faith groups" independently of local authorities.

He said there was a "growing fear" that they would "pit school against school" - thus denying teachers in existing schools the support they needed.


The lecture is given annually in honour of Professor Brian Simon, a lifelong champion of comprehensive education.

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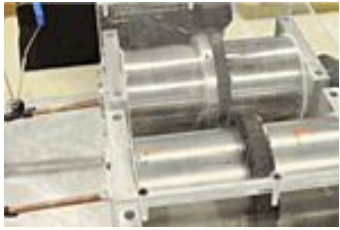


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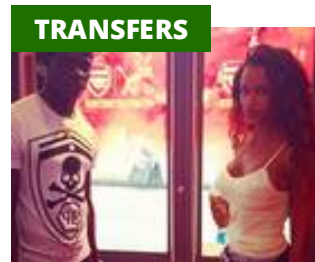
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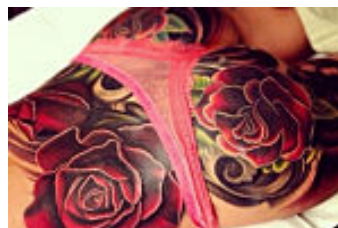
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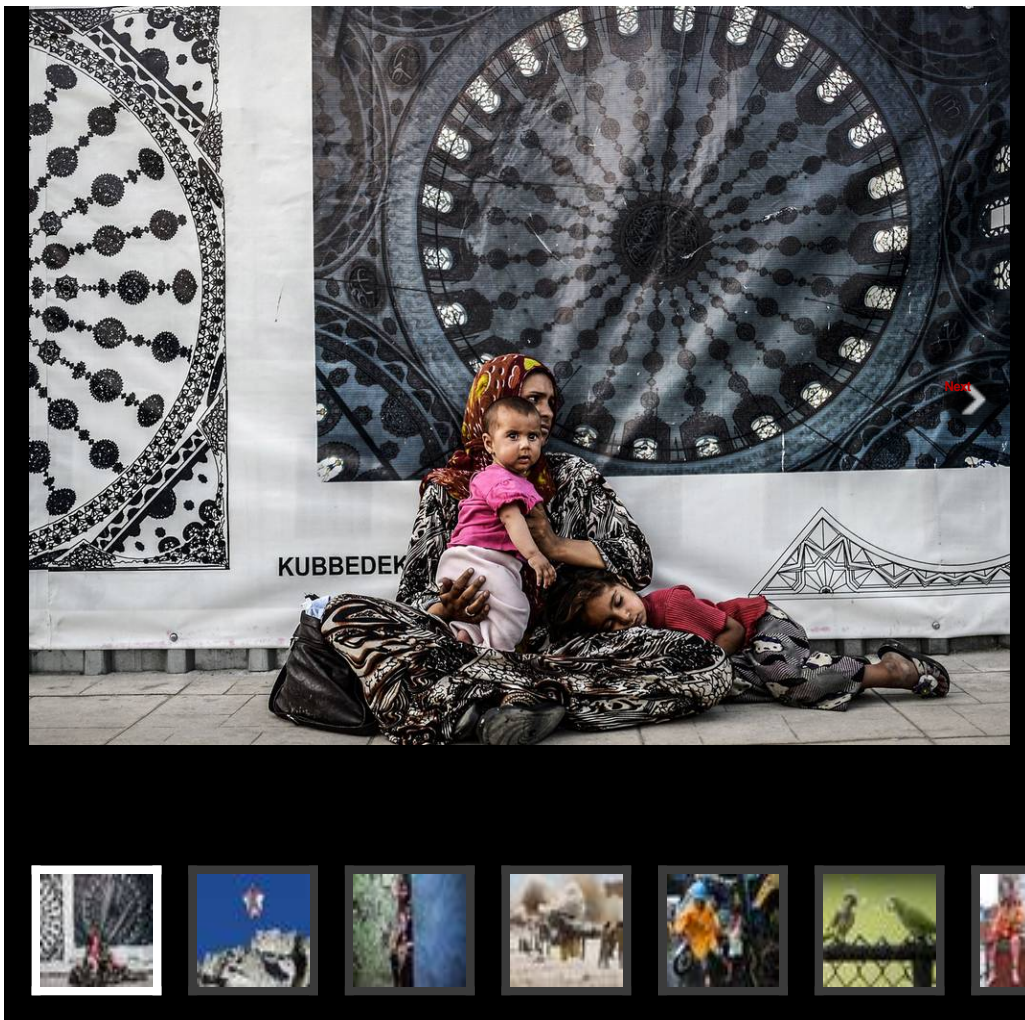
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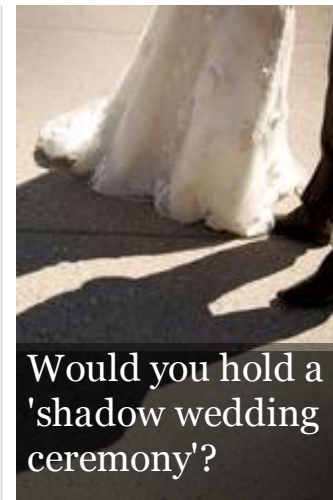
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