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# It doesn't matter what age your child starts school

## Your genes are more important than education

Philip Collins

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If we selected for university at the age of 11, rather than 18, pretty much the same group of children would go. Secondary school transmits information into children. They do tend to come out knowing more stuff than when they went in. But overall, school's not that important. And so it follows that the Alexander review of the primary school curriculum, published today, is quite right to say we could send children to school at 6 rather than 5.

It's very hard to believe this. It's so much more romantic to suppose that an inspirational teacher changed the course of your life. Actually, Robin Williams, Rowan Williams, Venus Williams — it doesn't matter that much. Your genetic inheritance, the mystery of your own talents, the influence of your peers — they are all more important than school.

Unfortunately, parents have gone nuclear about homework. If Jack and Sophie are not bringing differential calculus and *Great Expectations* (unabridged, no pictures) home from nursery, they think they'll never get through the Common Entrance Exam. So send them to Eton at birth; don't just put their names down.

We all need to relax. Swedish children don't start school proper until the age of 7. This is good news for the Labour Party because there is a rule on the Left of politics that if something happens in Sweden it must be all right. Finnish kids don't start until 7 either, and they are the brainiest in the world at 11. The Danes, the French and the Norwegians all start at 6, and they all manage a better performance by 11 than we do.

If you are reluctant to believe it doesn't matter, then you should join the Norwegian Army. Almost all Norwegian children take the military enrolment IQ test, and their scores have been judged against their school starting age, because children in Norway start in the year they turn 7.

It turns out that the age you start school doesn't matter, but the age you are at when you take the test very much does. In schoolboy terms, it's good to be old for your year.

So, anxious parents, here is some advice. Don't worry about what age your child starts school. If they are bright, they'll be fine. But if you are thinking of having children, and the school term is due to start in September, get on with it about the turn of the year.

As for the Government, there is no reason why it needs to take a view at all. It could just loosen the curriculum so that if you think your child could benefit from times tables and long division at the age of 4, you could choose it. Or if, like me, you think that Postman Pat is learning enough until 6, you could choose a later start. After all, it doesn't matter much either way.

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