

mortarboard

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Testing, testing - too much for our children?

When it comes to tests children themselves gave mixed messages to the Cambridge University researchers and seemed less hostile to them than teachers and parents.

Are our children under intolerable pressure from a combination of testing inside primary classrooms and the mad, mad world outside it?

Stressed out seven year olds, forced to grow up too soon, was the main message drawn from today's first report from the Primary Review.

But as a sign of how confused we are, the Guardian also carries a report today bemoaning the fact that not all children can write their names or read much by the age of five - this at an age when children in much of Europe haven't even started formal schooling.

(Today's report is confined to England - it will be interesting to see if future reports (32 are planned) make comparisons with continental schools or even with Scotland.)

Interestingly, when it comes to tests children themselves gave mixed messages to the Cambridge University researchers and seemed less hostile to them than teachers and parents.

Some said they found the Sats tests (taken at ages seven and 11) "scary" and thought they would affect their futures. But others said tests helped them know what they have learned and how they were doing. One said firmly: "Children should be tested to show they have done well and have been listening".

The soundings taken in schools around England got the "repeated sense" that homework was dominating too much of children's lives, especially among Muslim children in the north west who were attending mosque school every evening.

Fears about outside threats like global warming do permeate children's lives, although as the Times Education Supplement pointed out today primary schools are a haven from outside troubles. The report found that in several schools children were involved in environmental and energy-saving projects and the sense that "we can do something about it" seemed to make all the difference. "This more positive outlook was most evident in the school whose environmental activism was spearheaded by an 'Eco-action' group with representatives from each year."