

News



Tim Ross

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Ministers were condemned today for rejecting the most comprehensive inquiry into primary education for 40 years.

The [Cambridge University](#)-based Primary Review called for an overhaul of England's "Victorian school system". It proposed that pupils should start formal education a year later and recommended urgent reforms to high-pressure tests, teacher training and the "narrow" curriculum.

The politically-independent review was led by some of the country's most eminent educational academics, took six years and resulted in a final report 608 pages long. But schools minister [Vernon Coaker](#) expressed his contempt for the study, insisting the Government's policies rendered many of its findings out of date.



MPs from both parties reject raising the school starting age to six

"It's disappointing that a review which purports to be so comprehensive is simply not up to speed on many major changes in primaries," he said. "The world has moved on since this review was started."

[Mick Brookes](#), general secretary of the [National Association of Head Teachers](#), criticised the minister's "extremely disappointing" attitude as a sign of the Government's "weakness".

"It appears that ministers are only going to be happy with a report that has got their sticky fingers all over it," Mr Brookes said. "This review is independent and a breath of fresh air."

Both [Labour](#) and the Tories rejected the inquiry's call to increase the age at which children start formal lessons from five to six. The Government believes all children should start school aged four. But Dame Gillian Pugh, who chaired the review, said forcing four year olds to "sit quietly" put them off reading, undermining their future education.

"Countries where children start more formal learning at six or seven actually overtake us as the children get older," she said. The report said state primary education was designed on a 140-year-old model and needed to be updated.

The Conservatives backed the review's plan to improve primary teachers' expert knowledge of their subjects.



Reader views (-)

Paul Laing - but in Germany they have a great uptake of places for Kindergarten, don't they? Perhaps it is the same as in France where, technically, the obligatory start-age for school is 5 however all children start (pretty much without exception) in Maternelle at 3. Ecole Maternelle is in the same building as Ecole Primaire, and they start with simple rules like how to go to the loo and not hit each other and who is in charge, then progress to writing their name, sorting shapes, etc and basic phonics - thus leaving them comfortable in the school environment, ready to start learning straight away at 5 and with their needs for learning support already assessed. I notice that the 2 English boys who have just joined my son's class at 7 are about 2 years behind the other kids in their play development and in their respect of both other children and the teachers - possibly because they started school at 5 in England, not at 3. The English equivalent of a 'Maternelle' is a nursery, for which most parents will have to pay and not all children will get a place.

- Roz, France

At this moment of time I wish to comment on the horrible system that is prevalent with the 11+ exams to enter selective comprehensive and grammar schools. Why can't Britain have an equally distributed education system in schools that is available to every and not only for the cream of the society!

- Uma, London

Nick Gibb (ex taxman) and Vernon Coaker (professional

politician), neither remotely involved in 'sharp end' education, reply with indecent haste to these proposals. Despite all of the evidence from abroad, despite scoring badly in UNICEF's childhood welfare table, despite Finland having literacy standards that are the best in the world and children who start school at 7, they turn their faces from the facts.

The charmless Coaker even aims an insulting remark at the authors of the report.

No depth of thought, no concern for the happiness of our children and minds closed to a radical but well-conceived proposal. Hardly surprising given that our wretched politicians have meddled and muddled in education for decades, making the situation worse each time they produce their latest 'ground breaking' initiative.

I truly despair to think that our children's futures are in the hands of such dogmatic, inept and arrogant individuals.

- John Bennett, Yeovil, Somerset

Just a thought, but do you think that maybe one of the major problems with education in this country is that there is constant upheaval in the system? Either free schools to teach how they want with standardised testing at infrequent periods or leave the curriculum alone and work on quality. What would be a broader curriculum anyway? Something like the IT course I recently saw, where children were questioned on whether putting coffee on top of a monitor was a good idea.....

- Mark, London

Here is a radical idea, how about just raising the standards within the educational system we currently have?

Oh yes, Labour are in government.

- Frank, Home Counties, England.

The government will never agree to proposals like this because it means there will be less exposure to government propaganda. Measures are in place to extend their already excessive powers. Look forward to compulsory nursery attendance and mandatory home visits (the latter being put in place with home educators as a trial group). There will be no right of appeal, complaint or review. But the really sad thing is that most people will probably just hand over their children to the state without a word of protest.

- Rob, Rochester

Strikes me that the government would never back this as it means that they'll potentially have more women out of work as they take more years off work and the unemployment figures won't look so good and then they'll be less 'women in the boardroom' which makes them look bad. The government haven't shown any interest in the welfare of the average child for many years, so why start now? What's in it for them?

- Annie, london

This government is wrong to reject the proposal that children should not begin formal education until the age of 6. I lived in Germany for some years where this has long been the practice and remains so. The educational outcomes for children there are considerably better than for children in this country. The fact is we have the worst state education system in Europe and this is because of the desire of left wing educational so-called 'experts' to impose Stalinist type education on our children. These people are not willing to accept that they may be wrong and refuse to countenance any significant changes to the system.

- Paul Laing, Bedford, UK

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