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MailOnline

Fears for 'exhausted' children as Ed Balls steps up the push to start schooling at FOUR

By [Sarah Harris](#)

Last updated at 5:38 PM on 20th October 2009

Parents will be encouraged to send their children to school at the age of four under a major shake-up of primary education.

Schools Secretary Ed Balls wants youngsters to start classes in the September after their fourth birthday, instead of waiting until the compulsory schooling age of five.

The move comes despite a major inquiry into primary education in England last week concluded that youngsters should not start formal learning until they were six.



Early learning: The current school-starting age is already among the lowest in Europe

The current school-starting age - a term after a child's fifth birthday - is already among the lowest in Europe.

This compulsory schooling age will remain, but Mr Balls wants to change the mandatory School Admissions Code, which will effectively lower the starting age to four as parents are pressured to enrol their children earlier.

The changes, published for consultation today, will come into force in February and apply to admission arrangements from September 2011.

In a concession to critics who believe youngsters are being schooled too early, parents will be able to choose whether their children start reception classes full or part-time in the September, January or April after their fourth birthday.

But critics claim that thousands of exhausted young children will be turned off formal learning as a result of the overhaul.

Parents will be able to opt for a free full-time place in a nursery if they believe their son or daughter is not ready for school. They may also choose to wait until the compulsory schooling age of five.

The change comes after Mr Balls accepted Sir Jim Rose's primary curriculum review, published in April. It stressed that children should be able to start school from the earliest possible point after their fourth birthday.

Mr Balls said yesterday: 'It is important that children hit the ground running (at) school. There is clear evidence the sooner summer-born children start pre-schooling, the sooner they close the gap on their peers.'

However, the Cambridge Primary Review last week claimed there was no evidence.

It did, however, say there were suggestions an early schooling start could do harm, and called for a delay in formal lessons until the age of six.

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I only wish the information in this article were accurate I would much rather my son had been able to wait until he was five to start school. They start school the term (or two) BEFORE they turn five in Nottinghamshire, and the September before they turn five in Gloucestershire. Probably in many other places too. It is a lot to demand of little ones and all the signs are that our education system is less efficient than many which start education at 6 (Europe, Japan etc) so why push them into it so early?

- Liz, Nott'm, UK, 20/10/2009 20:48

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Apart from the fact that little dots should be with their parents could the dictaorship tackle the problem of school age children not being at school, Home education has resulted in many children roaming the streets. A child has a right to education which is why we have schools!

- andrea m preston, glastonbury uk, 20/10/2009 20:40

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Children in Northern Ireland start at 4 years of age (as long as they turned 4 before 1/7/09) and the comparison of results between NI and the rest of the UK show this is a success.

This might change in years to come though now that academic selection is being forcibly removed - removing the chance for children to move forward in a school most suited to their strengths.

But the starting at four certainly works, by P2 (5yrs) I had read my way through the junior school library and still have that love of reading today!

- Elizabeth, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 20/10/2009 13:13

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I would like to ask Mr Balls why the new 'academy' schools are funded by military companies such as British aerospace?

do we have an agenda here?

- no2eu, London, 20/10/2009 02:37

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When you register your child, like your car, the government have the right to claim ownership as and when it feels fit. A child can be taken from you and a car can be crushed. A little known fact.

- infowars, no2tyranny, 19/10/2009 18:04

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I have chosen to delay my sons start until next sept as he is a summer born child. I am so glad that I have had this choice & feel so upset for future parents who will basically be forced to send their children to school even if they are not ready for it. Parents know their children better than anyone & as a parent you know instinctively if they are not ready to start school. I do not understand why this choice is being taken away from responsible adults who want the best for their individual child & as usual the shameful government are happy to put childrens best interests to one side for the sake of money. My son is gaining a fantastic education at a nursery school where he learns through play without the unnecessary (but very real) pressures of primary school where he would be just another number in a class full of 30 children with 1 teacher & 1 classroom assistant. The awful damage to confidence, self esteem, & learning that too early schooling can cause is often irrevocable.

- Lindy, Bradford, West Yorks, 19/10/2009 16:15

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Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd
Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

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