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# School should begin at six, says key education report

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## Major review says school starting age should be raised and Sats should be scrapped

Schoolchildren should not start formal lessons until they turn six, according to the authors of the biggest inquiry into primary education for 40 years.

The Cambridge Primary Review said that children should be allowed to focus on play-based learning so that those who struggle at four or five are not put off for life. The government currently plans to lower the school starting age to four.

The chairwoman of the review, Dame Gillian Pugh said: "If you introduce a child to too formal a curriculum before they are ready for it then you are not taking into account where children are in terms of their learning and their capacity to develop."

She added: "If they are already failing by the age of four-and-a-half or five it's going to be quite difficult to get them back into the system again."

The report also calls for Sats to be scrapped to relieve the intense pressure on pupils. It argues that the tests should be replaced with teacher assessments in a wider range of subjects than just the 3Rs.

The inquiry, six years in the planning and writing, also warns that under Labour the curriculum has been narrowed and that teachers teach in a system that has "Stalinist overtones". It calls for more specialist teachers in history, music and languages and says that teachers should have two year post-graduate training, instead of one.

The schools minister, Vernon Coaker, said that the review was outdated as the government had begun reforming the curriculum and testing.

"It's disappointing that a review which purports to be so comprehensive is simply not up to speed on many major changes in primaries. The world has moved on since this review was started. If every child making progress and reaching their potential is what matters, then Professor Alexander's proposals are a backward step," he said.

The Conservative shadow schools minister, Nick Gibb, said: "We agree that the wave of bureaucracy over the past decade has been deeply damaging and we must trust teachers more."

But he rejected the proposal to raise the school starting age to six and emphasised his commitment to the current system. In many European countries, children start school later but in Britain all three-to four year olds receive at least 12.5 hours of education a week.

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