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Sats tests 'should be axed' in school shake-up

Sats tests should be scrapped in their current form as part of a major overhaul of English primary schools, a landmark report will conclude.

By [Graeme Paton](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/graeme-paton/) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/graeme-paton/>), Education Editor

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The existing system for 11-year-olds should be reformed amid claims children's right to a balanced curriculum has been "sacrificed" in pursuit of exam results, according to the biggest study of its kind in 40 years.

Academics are also expected to call for overcrowded timetables to be slimmed down and almost a third of the school week to be handed over to teachers to develop their own lessons focused on the local community.

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The conclusions – by the Cambridge Primary Review – will represent a damning indictment of Labour's education reforms.

It will say that a "narrow" focus on English and maths has been at the expense of a more rounded education, leaving many children ill-prepared for secondary school.

The four-year review, led by Professor Robin Alexander, based at Cambridge University, will say that art, music, drama, history and geography need to be "vigorously re-asserted" in primary schools.

It is also expected to claim that science has been neglected following the implementation of Labour's "national strategies" in 1998 designed to improve standards in the three-Rs.

But it is feared the Government will largely shun the report, which is being produced following submissions from 900 academics and teachers around the world.

Earlier this year, Labour published its own review of primary schools – carried out by Sir Jim Rose, former head of inspections at Ofsted – but it was not allowed to consider the issue of national tests.

Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The Rose review was flawed. Firstly, it was not an independent report and, secondly, Jim Rose was expressly forbidden to consider assessment. It is patently obvious that you cannot change the curriculum without changing the tests on which it is based.

"The fact that the Government now seems prepared to completely ignore the Cambridge Primary Review is quite extraordinary. This is clearly a work of great scope and importance."

The Primary Review was set up in 2006 and has already published a series of interim reports into key issues covering child welfare, reading standards, teaching methods and the curriculum. A final report will be published on Friday before a series of regional conferences.

It is billed as the biggest study of its kind since the 1967 Plowden report, which heralded an expansion of nursery education, smaller class sizes and a three-tier system of first, middle and secondary schools.

Currently, children are given Sats in English and maths at 11. Ministers scrapped a corresponding test in science earlier this year.

The Primary Review is expected to call for remaining tests to be axed in their current form at 11. It is likely to call for them to be replaced by a system of informal teacher assessment.

"The problem of the curriculum is inseparable from the problem of assessment and testing," the review team has already said. "Unless the national assessment system is reformed, especially at [11], changes to the curriculum will have limited impact and the curriculum outside the favoured zone of tested subjects will continue to be compromised."

The Review is also likely to suggest introducing 12 broad aims focusing on the development of the individual child and their understanding of the wider world as well as learning. It then proposes teaching lessons according to eight "domains", covering arts and creativity; citizenship and ethics; faith and belief; language, oracy and literacy; mathematics; physical and emotional health; place and time; and science and technology.

The National Curriculum should take up no more than 70 per cent of teaching time, it will add, giving teachers the chance to tailor remaining lessons to their local community.

In an interim report, the review team said: "The case for art, music, drama, history and geography needs to be vigorously re-asserted; so too does the case for that reflective and interactive pedagogy on which the advancement of children's understanding in large part depends, in 'the basics' no less than in other subjects."

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