

>> [Back to the article](#)

Feb 20, 2009

Tests suffocating learning

Targets and tests 'suffocating learning'

LONDON - YOUNG children's education in England is suffering because the curriculum focuses excessively on numeracy, literacy and rigid testing, according to the biggest review into primary school education for 40 years.

The Cambridge University review says history, geography, science and even the arts are being squeezed out.

It accuses the government of over-prescription and micromanagement which it says is suffocating children's learning at the primary school stage and stifling teaching.

'Our argument is that their education and to some degree their lives, are impoverished if they have received an education that is fundamentally deficient,' said the director of the Cambridge Primary Review, Robin Alexander.

The report says schools should be freed of standard assessment tests (SATs) and league tables to allow them to make better decisions of what and how to teach.

Children's Minister Delyth Morgan defended the government's education policy, saying lots of consultation was taking place with teachers and parents.

'I do not think it's wrong that we should put an emphasis on the 'three Rs' and actually science is very much in there as well,' she told BBC radio.

'We are seeing great improvements in the number of children who leave primary school achieving what we expect of them at 11.

But we also have to support primary teachers to have that flexibility.' On tests, she said: 'We can't go back to a time when there wasn't an assessment at the end of primary school.' An independent review into primary education being carried for the government later this year will examine many of the issues raised, she added.

The Cambridge study accuses the government of trying to control what happens in every classroom in England in an overt politicisation of children's lives.

It says the introduction of national strategies in literacy and numeracy places an increasing strain on the curriculum.

'Our report steps back and says: 'what is primary education for and what are the aims,'" Mr Alexander added. -- REUTERS

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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

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