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Pressure at school — but children like being there

Posted: 17 Oct 2007 @ 00:00



by **Margaret Holness**, Education Correspondent

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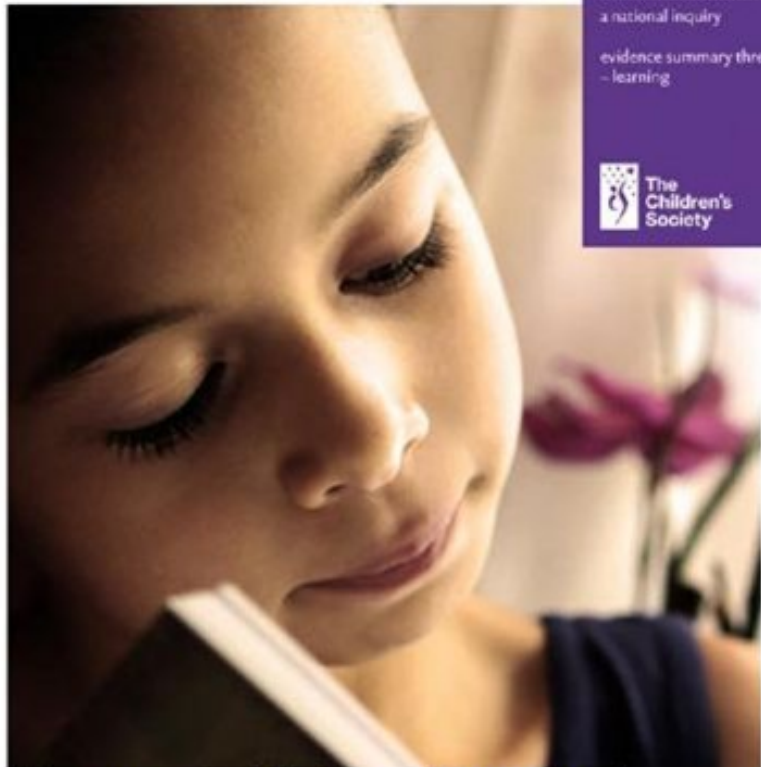
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the good childhood inquiry:
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TOO MUCH pressure at school is affecting children's well-being, suggests the report of a survey for the Children's Society, published this week. As part of the charity's ongoing work into the nature of modern childhood, this latest survey focused on learning.

Responses were sought from young viewers of the BBC children's

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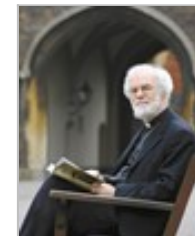
against FGM and child/forced marriage very important

Tue 22 Jul 14 @ 9:59
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programme Newsround, and 8000 14-16-year-olds took part in a survey by the market-research company GfK NOP. Of these, 58 per cent were concerned about exams, and 47 per cent were worried about schoolwork.

But the findings also suggest that most children want to learn; they enjoy structured teaching; and they resent being held back by disruptive pupils. Their concern was reflected by teachers who took part in the survey, many of whom complained that too much time was spent on dealing with problem behaviour.

Teachers of young children also reported a fall in standards of speech and language, and felt that school could not be a substitute for the home environment.

In her summary, Kathy Sylva, a professor of educational psychology at Oxford University, who chaired the study's learning panel, refers to the persistence of "a long tail of low attainment from an early age among pupils from poorer backgrounds, some ethnic groups, and boys".

The chief executive of the Children's Society, Bob Reitemeier, says in the survey: "This tells us that social mobility cannot be delivered by a fair and equitable education system. Learning needs to address poverty and parenting, as well as academic achievement."

In many respects, the survey's findings are similar to those noted in the first interim report of the Cambridge-based Primary Review, published last week ([Comment](#)). It revealed widespread concern that children are under almost intolerable pressure from the dual affects of commercialism outside school and a rigid testing regime in class.


The Primary Review is the biggest survey of primary education since the Plowden report 40 years ago. That report ushered in a classroom revolution known as "child-centred education". Paradoxically, the more extreme interpretations of this approach were blamed for shortcomings in children's literacy and numeracy, which led to Government-imposed correctives such as the National Curriculum and standard attainment tests (SATs).

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The adults interviewed were worried about the effects on children of the celebrity culture and of advertising, which led them to demand the latest mobile phones and electronic games.

The issues raised by respondents were consistent throughout the country, said Professor Robin Alexander, the director of the Primary Review. “They do suggest some changes are needed in the primary sector”, he said.

Interviews with religious leaders showed a general desire for schools to emphasise the similarities between religions rather than the differences. But they also revealed conflicts of culture between home and school.

The overall judgement about primary schools, however, was that they were positive places where children wanted to be. The chief education officer for the Church of England, the Revd Janina Ainsworth, said: “The findings overwhelmingly underline the importance of pastoral care, which is the overriding aim of Church of England schools. We want our pupils to be fully rounded people, prepared for the whole of life.”

Both the Children’s Society study and the Primary Review expect to publish their final reports in autumn 2008. The Board of Education is planning a study of the contribution of Church of England schools to social cohesion.

A summary of the Children’s Society survey can be found at www.goodchildhood.org.uk.

For the text of the Primary Review interim report, go to www.primaryreview.org.uk

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