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# Morwen Millson: Everyone should get best possible education

Leader of Lib Dems on West Sussex County Council

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LAST week, the first major review of primary school education in 40 years was published by Cambridge University academics.

The report criticises successive Conservative and Labour governments for dictating how teachers should do their jobs, saying that too much emphasis is being placed on the three Rs and that the result is a primary school curriculum even narrower than

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that of the Victorian elementary schools.

It recommends that children should not start formal education until the age of six – in line with other European countries - with children being left to learn through play before that.

There should be a single primary stage and the present SATs tests should be replaced with assessments that test understanding rather than memory and recall. Primary schools should be funded at the same levels as secondary schools.

The report points out that the divide between the poorest households in Britain and those with relatively high levels of income widened dramatically in the 1980s and, although it had reduced since then, it is now widening again.

Good quality teaching, it argues, is essential for giving pupils a chance to escape from a poor background.

The Government reacted to this thoughtful and detailed report with a rather infantile statement from a junior minister, who said, 'It's disappointing that a review that purports to be so comprehensive is simply not up to speed on major changes in primary schools'.

The change that I find most striking is that in Britain today a poor, bright child will be overtaken by a less intelligent, but wealthier, child by the time he is seven.

Yet the Government is completely dismissive of a report that presents 75 well thought out recommendations, many of which are designed to tackle the shocking inequalities that Labour policies prolong.

The Conservatives appear not to have responded to the review at all, but a quick look at the party's website is not encouraging. Their only reference to primary schools is a pledge to 'look at reforming the testing regime to reduce bureaucracy and focus on every pupil's real needs'.

Liberal Democrats believe that all children and young people should get the best possible education, no matter where they are born.

We will introduce a Pupil Premium, increasing funding for disadvantaged pupils to the levels seen in private schools.

Crucially, however, schools will be able to spend this money in whatever way they want. For who knows better what a school's pupils need than its head teacher and the parents to whom he answers?

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