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Balls proposes school start changes

Schools Secretary Ed Balls has opened consultation on plans to allow summer-born children to start school at the age of four.

The reform would give summer-born youngsters up to two extra terms in school to offset the perceived educational deficit they face because of their birth date.

The four-week consultation begins days after the Cambridge Primary Review found that children should start formal lessons at the age of six.

The authors of the report, the most comprehensive review of primary education in England for 40 years, found that children responded better to play-based learning at a young age.

But the Government rejected the proposals, saying it would mean that many children would "start a long way behind others".

Mr Balls pledged to give all children the option of starting school the September after they turn four, following a recommendation from Sir Jim Rose's review of the primary curriculum in April.

Sir Jim said summer-born babies should not have to wait until later in the academic year, as is currently the case in some areas of the country, if their parents feel they are ready earlier.

Other proposals to be included in the consultation include the offer of free nursery places to parents who do not believe their summer-born children are ready to start school.

Mr Balls said: "It is really important that children hit the ground running when they start primary school.

"There is clear evidence the sooner summer-born children start good-quality pre-schooling, the sooner they close the gap on their peers."

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