
Storm over report into early learning

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By Hayley Court

A REPORT which suggests children do not start formal schooling until they are six has caused 'a storm in a tea cup' according to one Swindon headteacher.

Nick Capstick of [Drove Primary](#) School in Drove Road said many of the recommendations highlighted in the Cambridge University report were already in place in British schools.

"Whatever name you give to the methods of teaching used on three to five-year-olds, it is all the same thing," he said. "Some call it early years, some call it pre-school learning. At the end of the day, certainly at Drove, children spend the early years of their education learning through exploring and curiosity. This kind of teaching is 80 per cent child-led and 20 per cent teacher-led."

The inquiry, directed by Robin Alexander of Cambridge University, reported too much stress is being placed on the basics of education, creating a curriculum on young pupils "even narrower than that of the Victorian elementary schools."

The report recommends changes to stop children becoming disillusioned by the education system at a young age.

The 600-page report also suggests children should not start formal schooling until the age of six.

"This is all just a storm in a tea-cup," said Mr Capstick, who in June this year scooped a West of England Teaching Award for his outstanding contribution to education. "It is no secret that children learn best from a young age through their own curiosity and the desire to explore. It is called the *regio emelio* approach, and was discovered by Italian nuns in the Alps just after World War Two who realised children learn by exploring their surroundings."

Drove Primary, which has its own children's centre, offers educational services from the moment a child is born to the age of 11 when they leave for secondary education.

"We have midwifery support for expectant mums, mother and baby classes, rhyme time for small children and then our pre-school Jelly Tots for children aged three to five," said Mr Capstick.

Chris Keates, General Secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers union, said: "There is no evidence in the report which could lead to the conclusion that primary education is in crisis, as some commentators appear to be suggesting."

"Indeed the report recognises that there has been a massive investment in primary education and that primary teachers have delivered."

"The report appears to be being hijacked by those who seek constantly to denigrate the achievements of state education and wish to present a picture of a broken education system."

Mr Capstick added: "I don't think schools can be criticised for not being free enough with early years education on one hand and then be given strict targets to meet with the other."

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