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Plan to delay school for two years

BY MIAWLING LAM THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH NOVEMBER 08, 2009 12:00AM

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CHILDREN in NSW can start school as young as four but an international study says enrolment should be delayed until they are at least six years old.

A Cambridge University study recommends



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children aged under six engage in a year of play-based learning before they start school.

It found younger students are not emotionally, socially or developmentally prepared to tackle the rigours of a curriculum.

The findings are at odds with other research which suggests four and five are the ideal ages to start school.

Children in NSW can enrol in the first year of school, called kindergarten or Year K, at four years and six months.

They must be enrolled by the age of six.

Kindergarten students are taught English and maths for at least 12 hours a week. Their lessons include reading, writing, spelling and counting as well as simple addition and subtraction.

From next year, all public school kindergarten students will be tested in basic literacy and numeracy for the first time.

Most European children don't start school until they turn six and in Sweden, Poland and Finland, they begin at age seven.

Cambridge Primary Review co-author and chairwoman Gillian Pugh said forcing subject-based learning onto four-year-olds could dent their confidence.

"They are not going to learn to read, write and add up if you have alienated children by the age of four and five," she said.

"If they are already failing by age four-and-a-half or five, then it's going to be quite difficult to get them back into the system again."



Kindergarten students from Sacred Heart School at Mosman pictured today. (L to R) Ruby McIlrath, Olivia West, Angus McGlade and Felix Lee.

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Kissing cousins and the baby bonus rort

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The authors call for a "full and open debate" on the issue.

Child psychologist Dr John Irvine warned that accelerating children's learning could backfire.

"Play is the way a child learns what no adult can teach them," he said. "But we're trying to cut short children's childhood to fast-forward them into this manic anxious state where they get learned early."

"In time, the brain will turn off something it's not enjoying so they'll be at school in body, but missing in spirit."

Primary curriculum officer at Sydney's Catholic Education Office Franceyn O'Connor said children should be assessed individually.

"The idea that six, or any age, is the magic number when all children are ready to embark into the structured world of formal education does not make sense," she said.

National president of advocacy group Early Childhood Australia, Margaret Young, said children would be disadvantaged if the starting age changed.

She said delaying the start of kindergarten worked in Europe because they had strong transitional early childhood education programs, something lacking here.

"That's why we're reluctant to say 'let's move on to this model'. It's really dangerous to impose one without the other," she said.

Western Sydney mother Monique Fenech held back her eldest son, Nicholas, who turns six next March, from school this year because she felt he wasn't ready.

"The extra year has given him so many more skills. It means that when he starts school, he's going to enjoy it a lot more," she said.

An Education Department spokesman said the NSW Government had no plans to change its enrolment policy or lift the school-starting age.



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Results: Starting school

This poll was closed on Tue Nov 10 00:00:00 EST 2009

Should children begin school at age six?

- **Yes** 59.88% (715 votes)
- **No** 40.12% (479 votes)

Total votes: 1194

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2



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Bella of forbes

POSTED AT 4:57 PM NOVEMBER 08, 2009

I really think it is up to the individual child. My daughter is 4yrs 8mths she will be 4.11yrs when she starts school next year. She can count to 50 clearly, write her name and address. She can read kinder books and she understand maths. She also loves playing and shares, plays structured games and can also play on her own using her imagination. In her case, I feel that she is ready for BIG school as we call it. However, her friend (5yrs) at pre-school, can not read yet, she can not write and counts to 20. She will only play with my daughter and hates being on her own. If she were my daughter I would hold her back until she can learn a bit more. As a parent, you know if your child is capable of handling the structure of School. The option of holding your child back should be available. However, if your child is ready for school, it is not fair that you would have to make them wait, in some cases, 2 more year's is unfair.

Tony of Sydney

POSTED AT 2:56 PM NOVEMBER 08, 2009

So much for so called experts. What a load of garbage. My parents taught me how to spell and count before I started school at five years of age. Is the fact that I could spell and count some sort of problem. Bloody idiots. Of course children of a young age should not be put under any sort of pressure. They certainly should not be competing with each other. That would be ridiculous. However, children should be exposed to spelling and counting as soon as they are able to do so. Australian children are already way behind the eight ball and don't need to be stunted any further. The education system in this country is a disgrace.

Pedro of CentralCoast

POSTED AT 2:15 PM NOVEMBER 08, 2009

Another crock of a study. How about we hold kids back until they know some basic maths, science, geography as well, then the little dears will feel much more capable.

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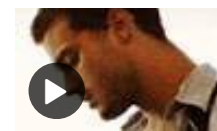
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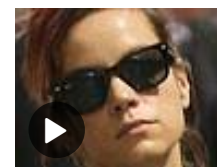
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Who's this 44-year-old mother of two?

THIS superstar looks absolutely incredible in a candid new bikini shot snapped by a famous friend. We love her, we hate her, we want to know her secret.

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Lily lands in 'sunny, happy' Australia

BRITISH pop sensation Lily Allen has touched down in Australia ahead of her highly anticipated Splendour In The Grass performance.

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KIM Kardashian says she doesn't have "sympathy" for her brother Rob, who has been battling depression and



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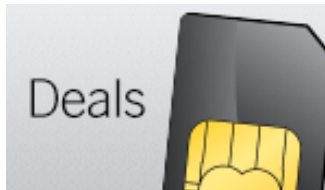
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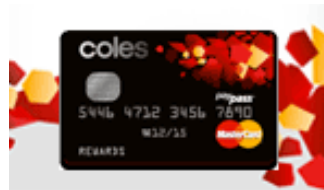
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