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Starting young has little impact on results

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There is no definitive answer to the question when is the best age to start school, the Primary Review has found.

Anna Riggall and Caroline Sharp, of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), compared England, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and New Zealand. They found that, despite variations in starting age, length of the school year, average size of school and length of primary schooling, there was little evidence of how these factors influenced test results.

They said: "The assumption that an early school starting age is beneficial for children's later attainment is not well supported in the research and therefore remains open to question, while there are particular concerns about the appropriateness of current provision for four-year-olds in school reception classes."

The school starting age is one of the issues that will be considered by Sir Jim Rose, former director of inspection at Ofsted, in his upcoming primary curriculum review.

Ed Balls, Children, Schools and Families secretary, has said that the legal requirement for children in



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England to be in school by the term after their fifth birthday will not change, but there is the possibility that young children could have a more informal curriculum.

An earlier Primary Review report highlighted that immigrant parents were shocked by the early age children start school in England.

The researchers found that most of the six countries they studied made decisions on school entry based solely on age.

The three reports published this week:

- Primary Curriculum and Assessment: England and other countries by Professor Kathy Hall, of the National University of Ireland at Cork, and Professor Kamil Ozerk, of the University of Oslo in Norway.

- Primary Curriculum Futures by Professor James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Professor Ian Menter, of the University of Glasgow.

- The Structure of Primary Education: England and other countries by Anna Riggall and Dr Caroline Sharp, of the National Foundation for Educational Research.

All are available at www.primaryreview.org.uk/

Publications/Interimreports

The Primary Review was launched in October 2006. It is an independent inquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England, supported by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. It is directed by Professor Robin Alexander at the University of Cambridge.

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