

Educationalists put case for informal classes

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By Ben Barnett

Young children suit more informal learning at the start of primary school [Education](#), according to Bradford educationalists.

The Cambridge Primary Review, an independent inquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England, suggests that children should be allowed to develop their skills for longer through play.

Formal schooling should start a year later, aged six instead of five, it states.

The future of education services in the Bradford district is the subject of a wide-ranging consultation by Bradford Council. A programme board, chaired by Council leader [Councillor Kris Hopkins](#), must devise a recommended education delivery model to succeed private firm Serco's current ten-year contract as Education Bradford when it expires in July, 2011.

Educationalists said a more play-led form of education for five-year-olds would benefit children, and in some cases this was already happening.

Janet Jewitt, of The Play Network, Bradford, which promotes play in the district, said: "It would be interesting as to how reception classes can cater for later formal schooling because teachers need to be play-trained and funding needs to come from the Government to support initiatives around play.

"From birth to the age six or seven play is really important. Children learn better through playing and it benefits their co-ordination, such as how to pick up a pencil.

"The longer children can play and have access to play the better. It can work with primary schools and I really embrace this if the Government runs with it full-heartedly."

Pauline Whyte, head teacher at [Newhall Park Primary School](#), in [Bierley](#), Bradford, said her school had already redeveloped learning for Year One children to make it less formal.

She said: "We are moving towards the Early Years Foundation Stage learning structure (outlined by the DCSF).

"Learning in a play-orientated way already happens in Year One. Formal teaching doesn't start until Year Two.

"It's much less formal. Traditionally you get children in groups sitting round tables or on the carpet and children are expected to sit still. Now we've adopted focus group work and constructive learning through play.

"Our experience of children learning through play is that it's more flexible about what children want to learn."

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