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## All work and no play for today's pupils



Children are spending less time outdoor while their lives become increasingly 'scholarised'

By Graeme Paton, Education Editor

12:01AM GMT 23 Nov 2007

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Children are being forced to work harder than ever with little to show for the extra effort, according to a major inquiry by Cambridge University.

Have your say: Are children working too much for too little?

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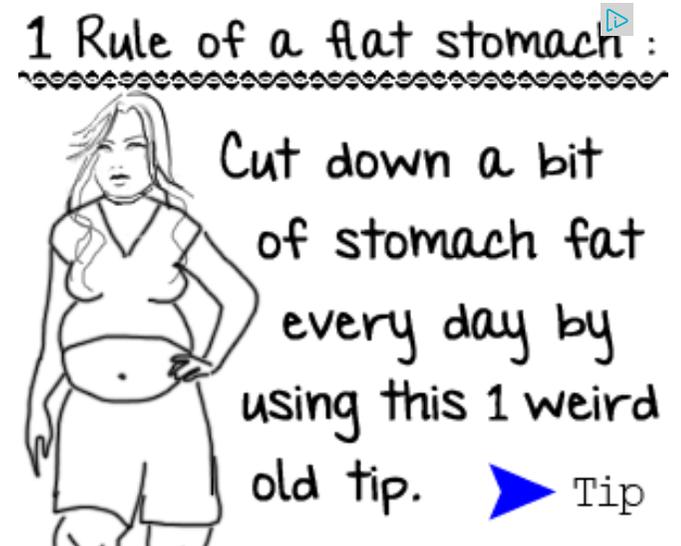
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They spend less time enjoying outdoor play and unsupervised sport while their lives become increasingly "scholarised", it is claimed.

Many parents are turning homes into classrooms as five- to 11-year-olds are pressured to do homework every week.

Other parents working long hours are placing children in breakfast clubs and after-school centres to keep them under constant supervision by teachers.



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Even at school, playtimes have been "pushed aside" to give more time for the "basics of the national curriculum", researchers said.

The conclusions - made as part of an investigation into the state of primary education in England - come despite claims that children are no brighter than previous generations.

Earlier research by Cambridge's Primary Review said the system of high-stakes tests and school league tables in England had "exaggerated" pupils' progress, with reading ability no better than in the 1950s. In a series of studies published today, academics said the introduction of parenting classes and Government guidelines on homework had placed fresh pressure on families.

However, "everyday parent-child activities" such as talking or making a shopping list may be just as effective as formal homework for helping youngsters develop.

Prof Berry Mayall, from London's Institute of Education, said: "Time



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children spend doing school-related work has increased and their leisure time has decreased."

Official guidance says children aged five to seven should do one hour of homework a week. Those aged eight and nine should do 90 minutes a week and 10- and 11-year-olds should complete 30 minutes every day.

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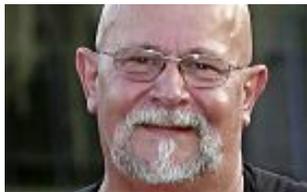


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**madeira4u** · 7 years ago

definitely too much too young. These kids are missing out on half their childhood ... no turn to drugs and alcohol

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**Tom Burkard** · 7 years ago

There's something sinister about all this. Hardly a week goes by without another 'expert' shouldn't be taught to read until they are six or seven. All of this is an oblique counter-attack which found that 5-year-olds learn to read with ease if they are taught with synthetic ph

It is true that children can become very distressed if they are taught to read with the methods of the 'experts', but age has nothing to do with it. For the last 16 years we have been teaching children who are blighted by trendy teaching, and thankfully our teachers are now starting to get the message. It is our 'Sound Foundations' synthetic phonics programme with 4- and 5-year-olds, but it does not damage a child's confidence when they fall behind.

Perhaps the sceptics should take the word of Sarah Ferguson, a headteacher in the Cotswolds who was convinced the Government to switch to synthetic phonics:

"The scheme may have been contrary to my educational philosophy, but very quickly we saw good results for the able as well as the less able. The children have developed remarkable listening skills, as well as confidence and self-esteem."--The Scotsman, Oct 28 1998

Does this sound as though the children were 'damaged' by 'forcing' them to read too early?

^ | ▾ · Share ›



**Grouch** · 7 years ago

Hey Folk's, Time to include Survival 101, into the ankle-biter curriculum..  
Take a long look down that tunnel...Yup..Thats the 3rd world staring at you..Missed the I  
Population Explosion..Climate Change..Yada,Yada,Yada...  
Get the Melon out of the Sand!!!  
Reality Check....Those kids, on top of an education. Had better be, Lean Mean Survivor:  
tough...You don't think so, Look around Sweet Cheeks...You Ain't Seen  
Nothing Yet. This is just a taste of their Future.....Nasty, Huh.  
Humans....Endangered Specie...

^ | v · Share ›



**NEKP** · 7 years ago

The homework requirements seem very light. I recall at age 6 doing around 4 hours of h  
in 1980). I live outside of the UK and when I return I notice more and more children are b  
households, or where English is not the spoken word in the house. This places childrer  
because the parents don't have the time or knowledge to help their children.

I come from an immigrant family. My grandfather was Greek and he struggled greatly w  
grandparents sent their children to prep school because they knew they couldn't help w  
grandparents were also very busy working. My grandfather was the captain of a ship an  
business which employed over 100 people. They didn't have the time or knowledge to h  
homework.

The additional problem we face in our society today is that women are forced to work in  
their heads. Salaries have not kept pace with inflation so women have been forced to st  
having children. I would love to stay at home with any children we have in the future but  
unless we come into a lot of money. It was my mother who taught me how to read, writ  
She was a housewife and dedicated 10 years of her life to bringing us up. It was a full ti

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**Mum to Four between 5 and 8** · 7 years ago

Back to basics. Throw out the rubbish. Let our children learn basic number facts, spelli  
two years and then see the difference.

Most of all, let them play.

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**sylvia evans** · 7 years ago

My mother taught me to read at 4 and when I went to school I can remember reading m extremely bored because I had inished mine much earlier than others in the class. I wa: home. Comments about 'hindering' are just stupid, as are many of today's teaching me getting great enjoyment from reading, and using my imagination. I am grateful I was tau early age, it is a pity that some parents just don't bother, which leads to children leaving write. The 3 Rs are most important.

^ | v · Share ›



**DavidB** · 7 years ago

The problem goes all the way up the age range. Since the combining of the Youth Servi Budget the Youth service has become an extension of schools and the cirriculum. We | spare time at all ages. The simple solution is to have an independent youth service and

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**james** · 7 years ago

I don't disagree with the findings, except when it mentions the actual hours of homework "eight and nine should do 90 minutes a week and 10- and 11-year-olds should complete 30 now, but that does not even begin to compare to the expectations placed on me. I w: did not enjoy homework (ever) but I still did far more than that. Homework was a nightly involved work on two or thre subjects per evening. I went to a private school and have a not the huge advantage that some say that it is, but if these standards are the level of ei sector maybe there is a difference after all, not in the standard of teaching but simply in children. We must not allow a situation where only those children that want to study do interested are allowed to get away with doing much less. I would never have got to the place I am in life now had I not been pushed as hard as I reasonably could be teachers and parents, they don't have to be slave drivers to achieve this)

^ | v · Share ›



**Phil** · 7 years ago



Children are not ready for reading and writing at such an early age, particularly boys.

Had you said \*some\* children are not ready then I might have agreed with you. And yes forced to learn before they are ready or made to feel failures if they are not. But neither ready to be held back, getting bored and disruptive, just because others are not.

My son is 6 - he has a reading age of 9+, and our problem is more to stop him reading than at age 6 he reads books for pleasure. Yet you would deny him and other children like him an arrogant generalisation that "children are not ready, especially boys"?

Making late-readers feel inadequate is wrong, I'll grant that. But equally a system which children is just as evil and abusive.

^ | v · Share ›



**Alice Taylor** · 7 years ago

My son and daughter (now aged 26) did not go to play school or nursery school but were vital first years. They had a stimulating environment but would spend happy hours at the water or in the garden in a pile of sand. They did not go to school until they were nearly to read. We had no computer at home at that time and in fact I did not like them using one meant they did not practise their hand writing and made them lazy about learning to spell. My village school with a good reputation followed by a local comprehensive.

My daughter now has a Phd in biochemistry and my son is a tree surgeon.

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**Pinkie** · 7 years ago

Why are we still debating this question? It's been obvious for years, except to control freaks who cannot trust children to learn without interference.

That applies as much to pushy parents as it does to politicians.

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**Jane Webber** · 7 years ago

I think that expecting children to start school at 4 is just plain stupid. Children are not ready for such an early age, particularly boys. Most countries start children off at around 7 and still have the same ability as British children at the age of nine. Forcing children to feel as if they have failed is abusive, destructive and sets them up with the belief that school is not fun, education is good for the average child, but also it's doom for the children from low income families. In many disadvantages, they are then being taught to hate learning.

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**Jimmy Kilpatrick** · 7 years ago

This isn't about early instruction at all it is against anything structured and systematic and is not research!

Jimmy Kilpatrick, Editor

[EdNews.org](http://EdNews.org)

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**Mr Chips** · 7 years ago

With two teenagers doing well I would say that they do not have to work very hard at all. At a highly ranked state school - I do not feel that nearly enough is demanded, academically there should be major broadening opportunities beyond studies, too. Instead, in my frustration much teenage time and energy is squandered. And that is at a 'good' state school!

^ | v · Share ›



**redjupiter** · 7 years ago

This is a joke right?!! What is wrong with doing homework. It is not about homework, it is the system who wants you to rely on benefits. I am happy for my children to do homework and I am proud when I hear their knowledge. I also, take them to the Gym and swimming and cinema working. This is called family life, together. Parents these days rather spend their time on themselves.

Wake up, if we don't prepare our children, the Chinese, Romanian, Indian, Vietnamese we are still debating if doing homework once a week is too much. Jeez.

^ | v · Share ›



**pauline** · 7 years ago

What is the matter with people today?

What's wrong with giving young children tasks to do at home? My children used to take words home to learn for reading and later the books themselves. They wanted to learn, school.

1950s....ah the age of REAL education! . I should be proud for any child to have the education standards we did in our excellent (state) primary school.(Dedicated teachers, who aimed to educate them, not dumb them down to the lowest common denominator for fear of elitism charges, and give them a good education.)

In my school most of the pupils in my class of 40 children passed for Grammar School.

We were given homework ... maybe spellings and tables to learn, sometimes grammar and finding out facts for History Geography etc. It wasn't an onerous amount of work.By the time we got home from school we were used to the idea of doing homework and took it all in our stride.

I also had private piano lessons once a week and went to Brownies and Sunday School. It was the mad whirl of after school activities so many of today's children do.

The 1950s was a good time to be educated

^ | v · Share ›



**Huw** · 7 years ago

Everyone is different - education has to be about the individual.

Forcing people to do things is often counter productive. However, if you surround a child with gentle (natural) toys, give them lots of love and adult time, talk to them as though they are intelligent, read to them lots - you are likely to have a happy child, with a good vocabulary and one who always loves reading - thanks to my parents it worked pretty well for me.

^ | v · Share ›



**dave** · 7 years ago

OK, 1955-64.....prep school and senior school.

beaten regularly for not working hard enough in the junior school.

Entered into 11 plus exam as a trial , failed.Passed common entrance at 13.

Four years in senior school.

Work pattern 0900-1700 with 2 hours of sport in the afternoons , saving friday which saw CCF, 2 gym classes per week and three fifteen minute periods of general exercise per 0900-1200 and a further 2 hours of sport.

Position regularly 22 out of 26 in fifth form.

Passed O levels , sixth form position 5/24 ,passed A levels, joined the 2.5 % of pupils at seventeen.Dropped out at nineteen!

retired aged at 51 in '98.

^ | v · Share ›



**David Gillies** · 7 years ago

At public school in the 80's, our school day was 8.45am to 6.10pm (with games either at the end or vice versa depending on the season), followed, after supper, by two hours of prep every Sunday. Even at prep school there was at least an hour of prep per day. Curiously, we were overworked and merely took this as normal. It stood us in good stead for life in the real world of 50+ hours that any professional must realistically expect to work.

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