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The Times (London)

November 23, 2007, Friday

Extra tuition and clubs give pupils no rest from learning

BYLINE: Alexandra Frean, Education Editor

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Children's lives are becoming increasingly "scholarised" as parents are encouraged to turn the home into an extension of school, research suggests.

As playtimes are cut to make time for more learning and as children increasingly find themselves under adult supervision in breakfast clubs and after-school centres, their opportunities for independence and free play are being diminished.

The research, by Berry Mayall, a professor of childhood studies at the Institute of Education in London, represents the latest findings of The Cambridge Primary Review, the biggest study of primary schools for decades.

In the report, Professor Mayall writes: "Children's time outside formal schooling is increasingly spent under adult supervision in environments which can be described as 'more school'."

He said that this was down to children being asked to do homework from the first years of primary schooling, and mothers being asked to help their children's study at home. As a result, children had limited opportunities for physical activity and free play.

Professor Mayall warned that children were likely to "resist" attempts to control their home lives in this way.

A separate report from the Primary Review reinforced parents' concerns over the pressure placed on children by national curriculum tests (Sats) in maths, English and science.

The research, by Carol Robinson from Sussex University and Michael Fielding from the Institute of Education, found that pupils themselves were worried about how little they were learning.

A third study from the Primary Review, by academics at the University of Bath, expressed concern over "the increasing number of children living in relative poverty".

Nurseries will get improved outdoor play areas, computers and expanded indoor facilities under a £ 642 million cash injection announced yesterday by Beverley Hughes, the Children's Minister.

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