

# England should follow Wales and let young children play

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ENGLAND should follow Wales' example and allow children to take part in more play-based learning, say the authors of the most comprehensive review of primary education in England for 40 years.

The Cambridge Primary Review found children responded better to play-based learning at a young age, and that there was no evidence to suggest it would hold them back in later life.

Its implementation would see England emulating Wales' Foundation Phase, the Scandinavian model of learning introduced last year and which encourages children aged between three and seven to learn through play.

Similarly, rather than changing the school starting age in England, the way children are taught up until the age of six should be reformed, the review said.

Review chairwoman Dame Gillian Pugh said: "If you introduce a child to too formal a curriculum before they are ready for it, then you are not taking into account where children are in terms of their learning and capacity to develop.

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

A spokeswoman for the Assembly Government said: "Our world-class Foundation Phase is exceptionally popular across the board with widespread support from the education profession, parents and most importantly children – it's making a real difference here in Wales giving children the best possible start in life."

The report found that in the current system of early years education in England, "quality is too variable, and too many staff are under-qualified or poorly paid".

It said: "Many practitioners believe, again backed by considerable research evidence and the positive examples of many other countries, that the principles that shape effective pre-school education should govern children's experiences in primary school at least until age six, and possibly until age seven."

In many European countries, children start school later, but in the UK almost all three to four- year-olds are already getting at least 12.5 hours of education per week.

The review, six years in the planning and writing, also calls for tests at the end of primary

school – Sats – to be scrapped in England, as has happened in Wales.

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