

Teaching should not be 'dictated' by politicians



Ian Toone, senior professional officer for education with Voice: the union for education professionals, comments on the Cambridge Primary Review. It was released last week.

Robin Alexander and his team put forward a very convincing argument for teaching to be given back to teachers rather than being dictated by politicians in the Cambridge Primary Review.

It is the professional duty of teachers to know what to teach and how to engage children at each stage in their development.

They need the freedom to do this without having to work within a straitjacket of narrowly-defined standards.

Political interference isn't what is needed if children are to be given the best chances in life and learning.

We are very concerned about children beginning a formal academic education too early in order to satisfy the demands of an inappropriate and overbearing testing and target-led regime.

Schools should be about educating children, not teaching them to pass tests in an inflexible, mechanical process; shoe-horning them into a process that suits the government's agenda and not the interests of pupils.

We need to move education away from rigid 'teaching to tests' in order to allow more accurate measures of individual pupils' performance and development.

Voice is calling for much greater use of teacher assessment, as this would allow teachers to exercise their professional skills for the benefit of pupils' education.

Pupils who love reading love learning.

Over-testing the mechanical skills of reading and learning demotivates both students and teachers.

Young children are individuals and vary greatly in their academic development and readiness for formal learning.

They learn through play and interaction.

Some Nordic and central European nations that do not start formal education until children are six or seven have broader curriculums that are better suited to children's natural learning strategies and provide a better foundation for life and lifelong learning.

A highly prescriptive, inflexible academic curriculum at an early age is too much, too young.

Many four and five-year-olds are simply not ready for formal learning. They can easily be switched off if they are compelled to follow the National Curriculum before they have reached an appropriate stage in their social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development.

Being able to stay with an extended, play-based curriculum, such as that offered within the Early Years Foundation Stage, would enable such children to continue to develop within a more supportive framework.

At the same time it offers children who are functioning at a higher level the freedom to extend their learning without being constrained by the parameters of a narrowly-prescribed curriculum.

A later start to formal education is Voice's preferred option.