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Govt rejects claim literacy no better than in 1950s

Friday, 2 November 2007 12:00 AM | 0





Govt rejects claim literacy no better than in 1950s

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Multi-million pound efforts to improve literacy standards have not achieved any notable results, a review of standards has concluded.

After assessing research from primary schools across England, the Cambridge University-based Primary Review concluded the "massive efforts" to improve results have had "relatively little impact."

Interim reports from its two-year inquiry show a moderate rise in standards in maths but very little improvement in reading, based on existing research into primary schools.

Authors Peter Tymms and Christine Merrell said: "Five hundred million

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pounds was spent on the National Literacy Strategy with almost no impact on reading levels.

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"Standards of reading have remained more or less the same over a very long time - since the 1950s.

"There was a rise following the immediate post-war period and there was a slight drop followed by a recovery after the introduction of the National Curriculum, but in essence standards have remained constant."

The report was also critical of national tests; finding up to a third of pupils could be wrongly graded at Key Stage Two. It said more emphasis should be placed on teachers' views.

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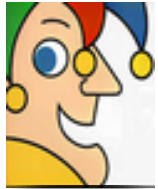
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Despite this, the researchers found primary pupils do "get a good deal overall". Children have a positive attitude to learning and a good quality of life.

But it raised concerns the achievement gap between pupils in the UK is much bigger than in other nations.

Schools minister Andrew Adonis did not accept standards have not improved

since the 1960s, insisted standards are higher now than ever before.

He said: "This is not an opinion: it is fact. 2007 results in reading show that 84 per cent of 11-year-olds achieved the expected level - up 17 percentage points since 1997.

"We know in the post-war period improvements in reading were static.

"It was precisely this analysis that led us in 1997 to seek a step-change in literacy through the introduction of the national strategies and daily

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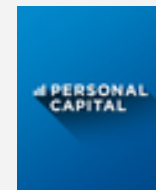
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literacy hour, an emphasis on phonics, and training for every teacher in literacy."

Nick Gibb, shadow schools minister, argued, however, improvements have not matched the millions of pounds spend on education.

Mr Gibb said: "As a result, many children, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, are not getting the opportunities they deserve, and the British economy is less prepared than it needs to be for an increasingly competitive future global economy."

The Liberal Democrats warned against an overemphasis on exam results.

Schools spokesman David Laws said: "We must not turn our schools into factories producing test results; they must be places where creativity and ambition are allowed to flourish."

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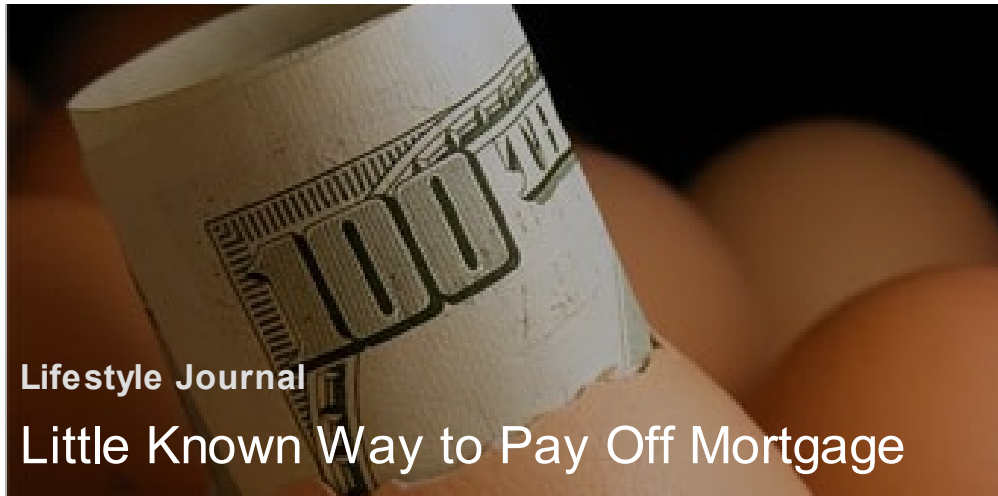
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