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# English primary school pupils 'over-tested'

Friday, 8 February 2008 12:00 AM | 0





Children 'start too early and tested too much'

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The government has rejected claims primary school pupils are over-tested and hot-housed through an unproductive school system.

The latest interim report from Cambridge University found primary school pupils in England are subject to more tests, at an earlier age and across more subjects than their counterparts in other countries.

This encouraged teachers to "teach to the test" but did not necessarily have positive effects on children. Instead the researchers found evidence frequent testing damaged children's motivation and self-esteem.

The two-year study compares schools in England with those in France,

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Norway and Japan. It found children outside the English system are tested in a "less intrusive, less comprehensive and considerably less frequent" fashion.

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The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) said it would make "no apology" for its focus on school standards.

A spokesperson said: "We want every child to achieve to the best of their abilities, succeed and be happy, and we know that parents and teachers want that too.

"The idea that children are over tested is not a view that the government accepts. The reality is that children spend a very small percentage of their time in school being tested."

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"Seeing that children leave school up to the right standard in the basics is the highest priority of government."

But the global comparison of education methods, the Primary Review found better academic results could be achieved through alternative methods such as Steiner schools.

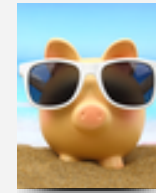
It also suggests pupils in England start school too young, enrolling one or two years ahead of other children.

The researchers agreed good early-years education was "invaluable" but cautioned it should not be confused with early primary education.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) said the report, which precedes the review's full recommendations in October, reaches "devastating conclusions".

Steve Sinnott, general secretary of the NUT, said the structure and

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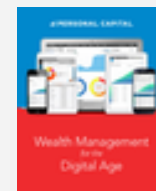
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content of education is now shaped by the demands of the test.

"Uniquely, England is a country where testing is used to police schools and control what is taught," he commented.

The NUT has urged the government to initiate an independent review into primary education and "be prepared to dismantle a system which is long past its sell-by date".

In its other key findings, the Primary Review noted the curriculum in England emphasises diversity and multiculturalism where other countries teach common values and shared national identity.

It also found that England has the largest primary schools, with an average of 224 pupils.

The Liberal Democrats said the review highlighted the need to preserve smaller schools, at a time when many have been threatened with closure.

Lib Dem schools spokesman David Laws said: "Ministers must look at innovative ways of ensuring that giant primary schools don't become the norm.

"The current curriculum's concentration on science instead of the arts and humanities is unusual. Such a rigid curriculum may squeeze out diversity and fail to engage many of our young children."

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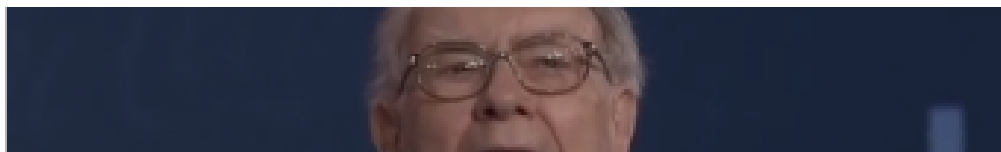
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