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## Coaker dismisses education review

Friday, October 16, 2009

A hard-hitting review into primary education in England – the biggest of its kind in 40 years and three years in the making – has been dismissed by the government while unions and teachers have welcomed its findings.

According to schools minister Vernon Coaker, the Cambridge Review, which recommended among other things that children should not be given formal education until they are six years old and that SAT tests should be scrapped, was out of date and didn't take into account the government's primary school reforms. The review also criticised the government for not taking independent, expert advice when formulating the schools policy.

Coaker said: "It's disappointing that a review which purports to be so comprehensive is simply not up to speed on many major changes in primaries. We completely refute the claim that primary standards have not risen across the board."

Christine Blower, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, described as "absolutely extraordinary" the government's decision to ignore the review's recommendations. "Any government worth its salt," she said, "particularly in front of an impending general election, would have embraced this immensely rich report as a source of policy ideas. It is not too late for the government to recognise that not all good ideas emanate from the minds of civil servants."

And Mick Brookes, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, insisted that the "comprehensive study" must be taken seriously by government. "The fact the work in progress has been completely ignored by the government is a sign of weakness," he said. "This report is truly independent, unlike work commissioned and controlled by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which largely says what it wants to hear."

While the Tory shadow schools minister Nick Gibb stressed that he didn't agree with all the review's proposals, especially the idea that politicians should end school for four to six year olds, he said: "We agree that the wave of bureaucracy over the past decade has been deeply damaging and we must trust teachers more. We agree that we need more specialist training for primary teachers, as we have been saying and which the government unfortunately has opposed."

The report from the review will be sent to every school in England and conferences will be held to debate it.

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