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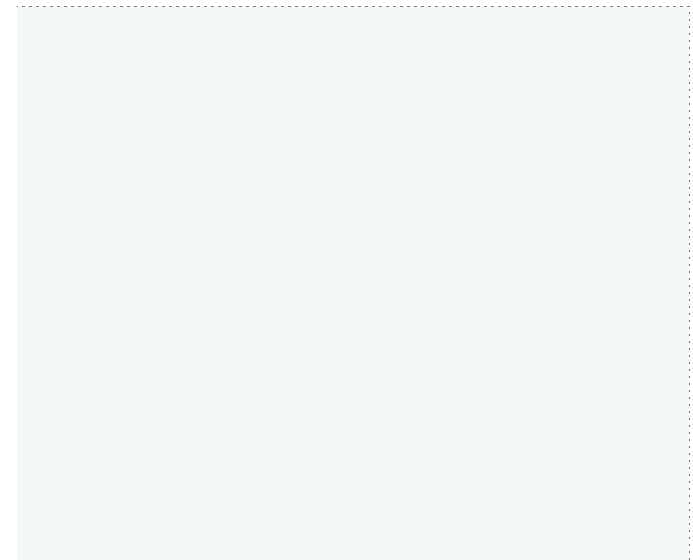
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Steiner's gentle way to teach youngsters

By [This is Exeter](#) | Posted: November 30, 2009



Learning through play: Pupils at the Exeter Steiner School start at the age of six OLIVER SANDERS EE031109_OS01_01



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LAST month, a major review into primary education concluded children should not start formal learning until the age of six.

To some, the recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review may seem radical.

But, there are already schools where children do not begin until the age of six, including Steiner Schools such as the one in Merrivale Road, Exeter.

The Exeter school teaches children up to the age of 12, but there are Steiner schools that teach up to 18 around the country, and even Steiner universities.

The Steiner schools movement was started by Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian educationalist and philosopher, a century ago.

His goal was to develop a curriculum that "advocates developing pupils' spirituality and sense of social justice to help them learn and become rounded human beings".

The Exeter Steiner School has 32 pupils taught in mixed age classes with two teachers and three assistants. Parents whose children attend the school believe educating their children outside the state system has many benefits.

School administrator Jenny Salmon's daughter, Maeve, six, went to the Steiner kindergarten and started at the school in September.

"It turns out the education at the Steiner School suits her very well," said Jenny. "It's very gentle and the children are allowed to just be,

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not rushed into anything."

Jenny said: "When she had been at school six weeks, she was coming in singing nursery rhymes in German — they teach German in class one. She's now teaching my husband German.

"My daughter can bake a cake and tell you the recipe off the top of her head. She is learning things, just not sitting down in a formal classroom.

"She doesn't realise she is learning. They run through what they were taught the day before. They learn through movement and games.

"It's a nice, gentle way of learning which suits my daughter."

The primary review also found children respond better to play-based learning at a young age, rather than conventional teaching.

But Jenny said: "Play-based learning has become a bit of a catchword with Government policies. You're talking about directed learning, where the adults make the games and the children play them.

"In Steiner schools, the children are allowed to play and the adults are not directing them. If they're outside, the adults might be doing gardening or woodwork and if the children want to join in then they can.

"With directed play, you are telling the children what to do, which they like, but they are not getting to think for themselves." Dimitra Liakou, a teacher at the school, said: "Rudolf Steiner thought we develop in seven-year cycles throughout our lives.

"According to him, the first seven years — from birth to age six —



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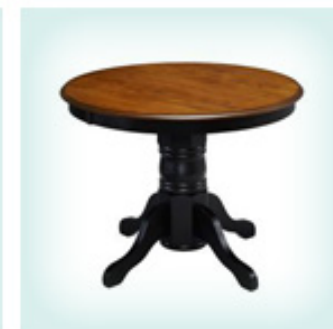
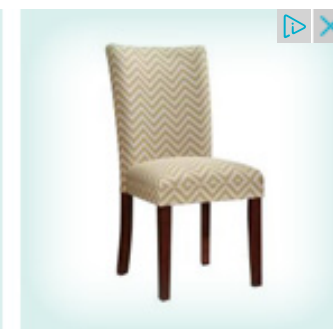
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should be dedicated to the development of the physical body.

"It is only when this is, to a certain extent, complete that are children ready for more formal learning.

"Children are more mature in every way — emotionally, socially, physically and neurologically — which means that they enter into learning in a different way.

"They are ready to take hold of it and make it their own.

"Because they are more independent, they are able to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour.


"The children in my class frequently state that they love school, and often can't wait for their holidays to end!"


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