

New study calls for radical shake-up of the curriculum to help summer born children

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Rowan, who is a summer born child, started school just after her 4th birthday

A new study by academics at Royal Holloway, University of London has suggested summer born children struggle at school entry because of unrealistic education targets and a curriculum that is out of step with their developmental levels.

The research, which is published today (Thursday 4th June) in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, reveals that many of the youngest children starting [school](#) do not have sufficient language skills to meet current [curriculum](#) targets, which are increasingly focused on reading, writing and verbal problem solving.

Professor Courtenay Norbury from the Department of Psychology at Royal Holloway, who led the study, said: "It is well known that summer born children can be disadvantaged at school because they are the youngest in the class and there is a constant dilemma for parents over whether to delay sending their children to school. There have even been suggestions about raising the age of school entry to six years for all children.

"However our study suggests that starting school young may be less of a problem if the curriculum is more in line with children's developmental levels and more emphasis is placed on developing children's oral language skills."

Professor Norbury and colleagues argue that given many children in England start school shortly after their fourth birthday, developing spoken language should be a key priority in the curriculum to ensure that all children have the foundations to develop literacy, numeracy and social skills.

"We need to make sure that [young children](#) experience early success at school so that they develop confidence and become enthusiastic learners. If curriculum targets are out of reach, problems with learning and behaviour may become entrenched," she added.

The findings are based on the Surrey Communication and Language in Education Study (SCALES), the first UK population study of language ability at school entry, involving over 170 primary schools in Surrey. In the study, teachers provided ratings of speaking, listening and behaviour for every child in their class and data were available for 7,267 children who started a reception classroom in 2011 (~60% of all eligible children).

Professor Norbury concluded: "Our findings suggest that the curriculum

is setting these young children up to experience failure in their very first year of school. But an even bigger surprise was that across the population nationally, only 52% of all school starters achieved a 'good level of development'. If half of the [children](#) in England can't meet the targets, perhaps the targets are wrong and there needs to be a radical shake-up of the curriculum."

The story has already received widespread media coverage, including Professor Norbury being interviewed live on the sofa on Good Morning Britain as well as reports in the Times and the Evening Standard.

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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