

# The Herald

Web Issue 3065

February 8 2008

HEADLINE NEWS - IN THIS SECTION

INDEX

[Search this site](#)

[Home](#)

**LIVE UPDATES**

- [News](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)

**MAIN SECTIONS**

- News**
- [Sport](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Politician 2007](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Going Out](#)
- [Herald Society](#)
- [Our Awards](#)
- [Herald Forum](#)
- [Appointments](#)
- [Motors Online](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Property Awards](#)
- [Recruitment Awards](#)

**BLOGS**

- [Herald Blogs](#)

**ELECTION 2007**

- [Election Archive](#)

**FESTIVALS**

- [Celtic Connections](#)
- [Festival Archive](#)

**VIDEO REPORTS**

- [Video Week](#)
- [Burns](#)
- [Motors videos](#)
- [Film Trailers](#)
- [Paulo Coelho](#)
- [Glasgow 2014](#)
- [Edwin Morgan](#)
- [Video Archive](#)

**PICTURE GALLERY**

- [Reader Pictures](#)
- [Diana inquest](#)
- [Politician awards](#)
- [Student Showcase](#)
- [Picture Archive](#)

**SERVICES**

- [Order Your Paper](#)
- [Search This Site](#)
- [Free Daily Email](#)
- [Back Issues](#)
- [News Archive](#)
- [Photo Sales](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Help & FAQs](#)
- [Digital Edition](#)

**FAVOURITES**

- [Crosswords](#)
- [The Diary](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [Local Dating](#)
- [Local Weather](#)
- [Week In Photos](#)
- [Today's page 1](#)
- [225 Years of News](#)

**ADVERTISING**

## Four years old is too young for school, warn experts

[ANDREW DENHOLM, Education Correspondent](#)

March 18 2007

[Comment](#) | [Read Comments \(1\)](#)

The rigid start date of formal schooling in Scotland - regardless of whether children are ready - can disadvantage some pupils for the rest of their education, experts will warn today.

A conference in Glasgow will hear that starting children at primary school from as young as four can create an "attainment gap" which lasts until they leave school.

Sue Palmer, a former Scottish headteacher and government consultant on literacy, will tell the Education Reform in Scotland conference in Glasgow that the country should follow the example of Scandinavia, where formal schooling starts at seven.

advertisement

Donald Christie, from the department of primary studies at Strathclyde University, will call for greater efforts to prevent inequalities impacting on pupils when they move to secondary schools.

The calls follows the publication of a groundbreaking study by one of Scotland's leading educational psychologists, which suggested immature boys who start school aged four-and-a-half may never catch up with their peer group, even by the time they go to secondary.

Alan McLean said the chronic stress of facing social and educational barriers had a long-term effect on the development of their personalities and ultimate life chances.

Another report by Stirling

'Lots of children are now coming to school with poor language skills'

University, which looked at the average age at which pupils in Europe start compulsory education, concluded there was "no compelling educational reason" for starting school at five.

In Scotland, where there is only one intake a year, most children start primary one between the ages of four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half, irrespective of their emotional or social development. In most European countries, the situation is different. In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, children do not start primary school until the age of six, while in Scandinavia it is seven. Instead, they attend nurseries, where the emphasis is on learning through play.

The Scottish Executive recently recognised this by calling for much greater use of play-based learning in the early years of primary school.

Mrs Palmer will tell the conference, organised by Holyrood magazine, that children start school too early in Scotland: "There is increasing evidence that starting children at four is causing some children to fail, particularly in boys or those from deprived backgrounds," she said.

"Lots of children are now coming to school with very poor language and social skills and we need to address these areas before they start on the formal curriculum. We need all our children to move to more formal schooling at the age of seven when there would be a level playing field."

Mr Christie backed calls for a later start date, but said more needed to be done to ensure problems were addressed before pupils began Standard Grades. "If children start primary at five, we need to have a proper look at progress when they move to secondary."

"There are examples of good practice where teachers in both primary and secondary work closely together to shape the curriculum for children with different abilities and also look at the social and emotional support they need if they are more vulnerable. We need more of that in our schools."

An executive spokeswoman said: "We're introducing more flexibility into the curriculum for three to six-year-olds, introducing less formal teaching methods and enabling early intervention where needed."

"We are looking at freeing up primary one and making it less formal, but have no immediate plans to change the school starting age."

© All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without [permission](#) is prohibited.

[email article to a friend](#) [print article](#) [larger type](#) [smaller type](#)

**IN YOUR AREA**

**Weather**

- please select -

**Local News Search**

-- please select --

**POLITICIAN AWARDS**



**GLASGOW 2014**



**CLASSIFIEDS**

[Browse our classifieds](#)

**FAMILY NOTICES**

[Browse our NEW family notices](#)

**FIND A CAR**

[Search our extensive online cars database](#)

**THE HERALD**

Delivered to your door  
0141 302 7300

