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Teachers say tests will take fun from learning

By Tim Dick
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As nine Currumbena Primary School girls practised handstands yesterday, their teachers were talking of an uprising of their own.

Teachers and parents at the Lane Cove primary school are opposed to the standardised literacy and numeracy testing which the Government plans to tie to funding.

"The children are more important than the curriculum," said Andrew Cathcart, who teaches years 1 and 2 at the five-teacher, principal-free independent primary school. "As long as the children are happy learning, everything else will follow into it - literacy, numeracy, the arts and science."

Announcing the new funding tests on Thursday, the federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, told Parliament that parents would be told the results of "literary and numeracy benchmark testing in years 3, 5 and 7".

But benchmark testing is irrelevant as it does not show how enthusiastic a child is about learning, and has a narrow focus, Mr Cathcart said.

"It's disappointing that education is being reduced to a couple of numbers from a very narrow curriculum. Once you start making tests important, teachers start teaching towards the tests."

It costs \$100 a week to send a child to the school, which prides itself on being "child-centred and democratic". But any suggestion that its 88 students may fall behind their counterparts in schools that agree to conduct the tests was rejected. "Do they fulfil their potential? More so than in any other school I've taught in and I've been teaching for 40 years," Mr Cathcart said.

"We are accountable to our parents in a very big way. The people that leave this school are quite put-together as individuals and they carry that through to adolescence and adulthood."

Dr Nelson's department said that to receive funding, schools must comply with the "educational accountability requirements".

It added that "as parents have developed greater understanding of the role of such tests in their children's learning program they have come to value this kind of assessment".

Lynette Hawkins, whose son Laric, 9, has been at Currumbena for three years, said that testing had no place in primary schools.

"There's plenty of time later on to do that sort of assessment.

"Even the brightest of people might not do that well on those tests at that point and it can label people because they don't do well in those tests, whereas if it was left . . . they could be classified as a genius."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/03/12/1078594568306.html>

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