

# British school children could be guinea pigs for controversial new tests despite other nations rejecting them <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

British school children could be guinea pigs for controversial new tests for five-year-olds, despite other nations rejecting the trials.

The move is disclosed in a contract document published quietly earlier this month by the Department for Education (DfE).

The tablet-based tests, which will be run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) from next year, are understood to have been rejected by Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium.

Peter Moss, emeritus professor of early years education at University College London's Institute of Education, said there was concern that the new OECD tests could create pressure on teachers to narrow the curriculum to what was tested, as ministers emphasised the importance of its results.

He said: "The big fear is that it's going to reduce the diversity and creativity of approaches to early childhood development, as countries pursue better results in these tests. A lot of people in early years are concerned about that."

The new tests, which have been described as a "pre-school PISA" are in addition to the PISA tests which already exist for 15-year-olds. These are taken in over 70 countries and are regarded as an international benchmark by which countries can compare their education systems.

In England, a representative sample of some 3,000 five- to five-and-a-half-year-olds, in at least 200 schools, could take part in a pilot of the new tests in autumn 2018.

In the trial, the tablet-based tests will assess four aspects of pupils' development: literacy, language and verbal skills; numeracy and mathematics; "self-regulation" and ability to pay attention; and "empathy and trust".

Mathias Urban, professor of early childhood at the University of Roehampton and lead author of a paper backed by 170 academics which criticises the OECD's plans, said: "There is a lot of resistance to this developing, internationally.

"People are basically saying that this standardised assessment approach is not going to provide any useful information in terms of the diverse experiences of young children around the world."

A DfE "expression of interest" document, seen by The Telegraph, states that: "Currently three countries - including the UK (represented by England and possibly Wales) - have agreed to participate in the IELTS pilot study. Scotland and Northern Ireland will not take part."

An OECD spokeswoman said: "The new OECD study on Early Learning and Child Well-being will help participating countries to support all children get a strong start early in their lives.

"The study will help countries to see what is working well and where improvements could be made, including the experiences and outcomes of other participating countries."

A DfE spokesman said: "Making sure our youngest children are given the tools to achieve their full potential is vital, and high quality early education is such an important part of this. That's why we are investing a record £6billion per year by 2020."

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