

Playtime for school pupils is a fundamental human right, children's author says ^[1]

'Play isn't an extra, it isn't an add on,' says former Children's Laureate

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EXCERPTS

Break times at school should not be reduced, because play is a fundamental human right, a children's author and poet says.

Michael Rosen, a former Children's Laureate and author of *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*, has joined a campaign to stop the erosion of break times, urging for play to be seen as more than an "extra".

His comments come after a study last year found that school-break times have been cut by as much as an hour over the past two decades amid funding cuts and a drive to tackle bad behaviour.

Psychologists have urged schools not to punish children by making them sit in detentions during their free time, arguing that play is critical for wellbeing and development.

In a British Psychological Society (BPS) video on the importance of playtime, Mr Rosen says: "Play isn't an extra, it isn't an add on. Play is a fundamental human right.

"Whoever you are, maybe you're a mum, a dad, an auntie, an uncle or a grandparent, a child, a teenager, a teacher – whoever you are, let's get out there and play."

It follows research from University College of London's Institute of Education that warned of a "virtual elimination" of afternoon breaks and shorter lunch breaks.

At key stage 1 in primary school, when children are aged between five and seven, pupils now have 45 minutes less break time per week than in 1995, while pupils aged 11 to 16 have 65 minutes less.

Dan O'Hare, from the BPS's educational and child-psychology division, said they were grateful to Mr Rosen "for helping us make the case that play is vital for schoolchildren".

"Because play isn't just a means to an end: it's fundamental to children's development and wellbeing," he said.

James Bowen, director of policy for the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Breaks are essential for everyone in the school, and the negative impact on pupil wellbeing is definitely a concern.

"It's the unintended consequence of a number of factors. The school day is now jam-packed with tougher content and more obligations for schools to deliver.

"School budgets have been at breaking point for several years, so resources are stretched and the number of support staff available to cover break times has been reduced."

"Everything points to a system under incredible strain at the moment," Mr Bowen added.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, has called for a review of what is expected of schools in order to relieve some of the pressure on timetables.

He said: "There is great value in playtime for children to socialise and let off steam, but schools have to balance this against all the other demands expected of them.

"School timetables are bursting at the seams because of the pressure to deliver a huge amount of learning and to prepare children for high-stakes tests and exams. It is therefore no surprise that school break times are shorter than they were 20 years ago."

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