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Today's four-year-olds often 'not physically ready' for school, experts warn

Competitive parenting, iPads and screens are all contributing to a decrease in child mobility that can impact on academic learning

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Early-years specialists monitoring children of school age found a higher number experience problems with their balance and coordination than previously thought, ultimately affecting their ability to learn in class. Researchers from the University of Loughborough said the increase was partly a result of modern children being less active in their early years compared with previous decades, with typical movements associated with play and development reduced by the introduction of electronic toys and screens.

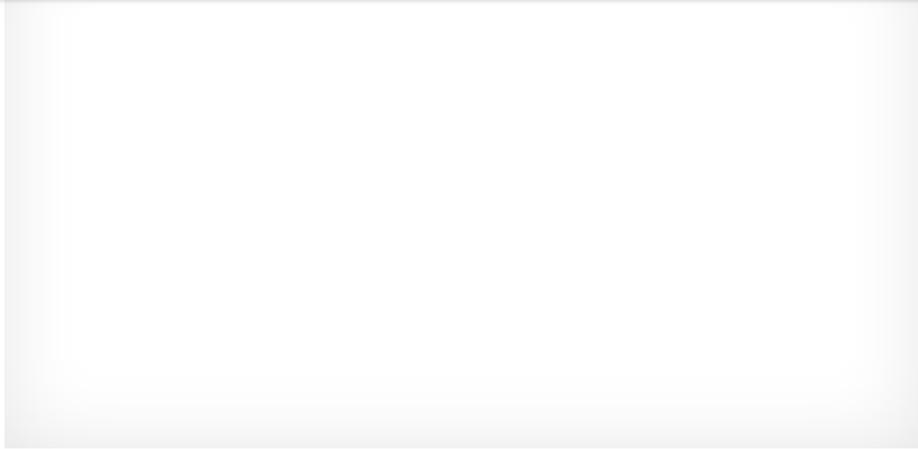
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Tests to assess Foundation Stage children's physical development at the start of the first school year found almost a third to be "of concern" for lack of motor skills and reflexes. Almost 90 per cent of children demonstrated some degree of movement difficulty for their age

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Dr Rebecca Duncombe, who led the study, said the lack of physical ability shown demonstrated that children are not as active as they should be in the beginning of their lives.



“A child’s physical development level impacts their ability to complete simple tasks such as sitting still, holding a pencil, putting on their shoes, and especially reading – all skills essential for school,” she said.

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Specialists from Loughborough's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences tested 45 Foundation Stage children at two different schools to determine the effect of mobility levels on their learning.

In a supplementary study of 25 Foundation Stage teachers, 80 per cent said they had identified a sudden decline in physical mobility happening within the past three to six years.

“Young children have access to iPads and are much more likely to be sat in car seats or chairs,” Dr Duncombe said. “But the problem can also be attributed to competitive parenting – parents who want their children to walk as soon as possible risk letting them miss out on key mobility developments which help a child to find their strength and balance.”

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could you pass a GCSE exam.

Physical development is part of the Early Years curriculum within nurseries and schools, but there appears to be a lack of awareness and understanding of the kinds of activities this could include, she added.

Following a daily programme that gave children opportunities to move, improve motor skills and develop primitive reflexes, researchers found that the majority of children experienced dramatic physical and academic improvement.

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Professor Pat Preedy, who co-leads the Movement for Learning programme, said: "Children today are moving less, they're developing less well, and they're learning less; we need to do something drastic to make sure children now and in the future get the movement they need to develop properly physically, intellectually and emotionally.

"Research shows there is a link between early movement and children's development and learning. The Movement for Learning programme helps children do those movements they should have had the opportunity to do when they were younger and to be really ready to start learning and make the progress they should be doing when they start school.

"It's an easy, cost-effective solution for a growing problem, and this research shows it could be life-changing for so many children, particularly those with additional needs such as dyspraxia and dyslexia."

Researchers are now extending the Foundation Stage pilot to 30 schools and are in the process of recruiting Year One classes for the forthcoming school year.

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