

Editor's view



Why should nannies be seen as different from other childcare workers?

Week by week, month by month, the official view of nannies and their role as childcare workers becomes more anomalous.

It could be expected that as the Government wants to expand the childcare market, offer parents more choice and diversity and raise quality, nannying would be brought more into the embrace of Ofsted and the EYFS, and nannies would be seen as a part of an increasingly professional workforce.

Not so. We already have the ludicrous situation where nannies possibly in sole charge of children for 50 hours a week are not included in Vetting and Barring arrangements if hired directly by parents (News, 10 February), while children's authors visiting schools are. And a slack checking process for nannies signing up to the voluntary childcare register has been exposed (News, 18 March).

Now it turns out that Sir Roger Singleton's review of physical punishment laws, which has commendably favoured the banning of smacking by tutors and part-time educational and religious settings, has omitted nannies, au pairs and babysitters (News, page 4).

The questionable logic of this is that nannies and babysitters are considered to constitute part of the household, and to define the family or household would be 'cumbersome' and 'largely impractical', says Sir Roger.

Children's secretary Ed Balls says the report makes it clear that 'a child should not be smacked by anyone outside the family'. The Government and its advisors seem to be hanging on to a feudal view of nannies as part of the family they serve, which was widespread in *Nursery World* in the 1920s, but you would hope had disappeared in the 21st century!

This attitude only leaves children at risk.

Liz Roberts

TO THE POINT

Educating our educators



By Julian Grenier, headteacher of Kate Greenaway Nursery School and Children's Centre, London

The debate over the degree of legislation required for nursery settings seems to intensify as elections approach. If we follow a no-risk, rigid strategy for a curriculum in the early years we could create a sterile, boring environment aimed at average ability children, giving staff little room for creativity and expression.

I am convinced that further education for staff in the early years is the midwife that will deliver better ways of working from an old body of traditions and practices.

There is still some scepticism about early childhood studies degrees and EYP status. I think the doubters are wrong, and are ignoring the great potential of the early years workforce.

Many committed nursery nurses have been working with young children for decades without proper recognition of their intellectual abilities, their understanding of children's learning, or their insight into the complexity of managing group care. There are thousands of bright peo-

ple in the workforce who either did not get to realise their talents in school, or left school early and chose nursery nursing because it allowed them to start earning money at a young age.

The expansion of higher education, with new routes like Foundation Degrees, distance and part-time learning, has opened up study to thousands of adults later in life. This has enabled early years practitioners to begin to realise their own potential as learners, as well as benefiting the children they work with. Experienced nursery nurses can position themselves to train as teachers, if they wish to, bringing valuable experience into schools.

It is true that training for EYPs and teachers needs to be improved. But the deficiencies should not taint the whole project of raising the number of graduates working in the early years. Increasingly, this work is about the complexities of care and emotional development, the need to foster children's love of learning, and the effectiveness of multi-agency working.

We can choose to despair about the way things are going for children. Or we can engage with the problems, and try to do better for the next generation – which is exactly what those early years staff are doing as they further their education.

IN MY VIEW

End child detention now



By Beverley Naidoo, award-winning children's author

It's not usual to have five-year-olds and 15-year-olds in the same storytelling workshop. But there was nothing usual about the event that illustrator Karin Littlewood and I ran last December for imprisoned children. They were behind bars, not for committing some horrible crime but because they were asylum-seekers, and because we live in a society that forgets it has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – a society that is forgetting human decency.

Our aim that day in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre was to offer such a good time that these young minds would temporarily fly beyond the barbed wire-topped fences, locked doors and gates. For a short while, Karin and I too might almost have forgotten where we were. It was the five-year-olds, two brothers, who reminded us. Avoiding eye contact, even when persuaded to help hold a long reel of

paper for a story-drawing, these little boys told us through their body language and silent faces that they were traumatised.

All these children had experienced the terror of a dawn raid by the UK Border Agency and forced removal to detention-cum-prison. Some 2,000 children are put through this ordeal every year, even though families don't abscond. As Dave Wood of the UK Border Agency let slip in evidence last year to a parliamentary committee, 'it is not terribly easy for a family unit to abscond'.

So why does our Government continue to lock up children in conditions known to harm their mental and physical health? With an election coming up, few politicians want to risk being seen as 'soft' on asylum seekers.

But the medical profession has taken the lead in calling for the immediate end to child detention. Many children's authors have spoken out strongly, and I call upon early years professionals to take action. My friends at End Child Detention Now can help you. Contact them at www.ecdn.org, which also has links to the public petition and the doctors' petition. And hold your parliamentary candidates to account.

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