

30-hours 'free' childcare is 'economic suicide' says nursery owner ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Helen Gratton, founder of Yorkshire Montessori Nursery Ltd, secured a meeting with Early Years Minister Caroline Dinenage yesterday to address the Government's plans to double the amount of free childcare for working parents of three- and four-year-olds.

While she believes in the plans, she has been eager to address areas of concern, including the set funding package until 2020 and how providers will deliver quality care on a limited budget.

Representing providers across the country, Ms Gratton said: "Every aspect of childcare is affected by the financial constraints of supposed 'free' hours of funding for three- and four-year-olds. Hundreds of nurseries, playgroups and childminders will close unless the Government changes its inflexible policy on funding in childcare.

"We understand that there is no more Government money available to pay realistic, necessary rates but it is not acceptable that we are being forced to cover the shortfall and offer impossible cheap hours for something so important to a child's development and education.

"We must continue to offer well-qualified, experienced, dedicated staff; to maintain buildings and resources to decent standards and to provide training and development so that children continue to experience an excellent start to their life."

With the cost of living increasing and business rates rising, the funding package could leave care providers with no choice but to "hit parents with additional charges."

"The sums do not add up in 2017, never mind 2020," she said. "The funding rate is fixed until the end of this Parliament. What are we expected to do with annual increases of National Living Wages; increasing pension auto-enrolment costs; unprecedented rises in business rates, inflationary effects on utilities, food, clothing, fuel?"

Mrs Gratton says she would like the opportunity to pay staff based on their experience or specialist skills and believes nurseries will still have to charge parents for their unique services, such as food, because of the 'strict' funding plan.

"The only way this scheme can work is by providers being allowed to make some extra charges," she added. "The 30-hours cannot be free otherwise our settings are not sustainable. It seems that the Department For Education is ignoring basic economics."

Yorkshire Montessori Nursery Ltd has taken part in the York pilot of the 30-hours funding for working parents, the scheme which is to roll-out across the country from September this year.

-reprinted from Day Nurseries

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