

A frontline service? Nursery Schools as local community hubs in an era of austerity ^[1]

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Excerpts from Abstract

Nursery Schools in the UK have been described as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of early years provision because of the quality of education and a wide range of other support services that they provide, particularly for children from socio-economically disadvantaged families and those with complex special educational needs (SEN). In this paper, we explore the role of Nursery Schools in the local community, arguing that they have been re/constructed as a frontline service in the context of austerity policies enacted in England over the past decade. The data presented in support of this argument arise from detailed interviews with 17 staff based in four Nursery Schools. Our data lead us to argue that, in the current context of austerity and cuts to a range of local services, Nursery Schools are filling welfare gaps for families by providing clothing, trips and food voucher advice to families. They are also supporting increasing numbers of SEN children and are described as a first point of contact with state-run services by many, especially minority ethnic and workingclass families. We conclude by arguing that Nursery Schools’ funding must be protected so that they can continue to provide support to some of the most vulnerable children and their families in England.

Region: Europe ^[4]

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