

Government bid to reshape childhood [GB] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Children as young as two are to be offered free nursery care in a government drive to intervene in the lives of disadvantaged children at the very earliest stages of their development.

The subsidised places, to be targeted at poorer parents, are part of a major overhaul of early-years learning that children's secretary Ed Balls will present to the Commons next Tuesday

...

The 10-year Children's Plan will address the whole experience of modern childhood, including concerns about the decline in play outside of school hours and worries about children's self-confidence.

The plan, drawn up over the last three months by the department run by Gordon Brown's right hand man, will ask schools to be in regular email contact with parents to give up-to-date information on their children's progress instead of giving just an end-of-term report

...

Government research shows the level of parental engagement in learning is more important in determining a child's educational achievement than social class, family size or the parent's own academic attainment. Ministers may also expand parent support advisers who work to provide more effective connections between schools and disaffected parents.

The move to target two-year-olds for nursery provision means ministers are likely to put less emphasis on further extending provision for three and four year olds, who are entitled currently to 12.5 hours' free nursery education for 38 weeks a year, due to rise by 2011 to 15 hours a week and ultimately to 20 hours. Childcare spending is now running at more than £1.8bn in the current year

...

The government is under pressure to step up efforts against disadvantage as its drive to eradicate child poverty by 2020 stalls. On Monday, speaking at an End Child Poverty event, Balls will announce a £45m fund to give disabled children short breaks - including activity breaks with able-bodied peers - and allow their parents time off from caring

- reprinted from the Guardian Unlimited

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