

Parents lose out in nursery lottery [UK] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Parents seeking childcare are trapped in a 'postcode lottery' with seven children fighting for every nursery place in some parts of the country, a new report reveals this week.

Targeting subsidised places on the poorest neighbourhoods - as the Government has done so far - has left parents struggling elsewhere, the Daycare Trust concluded.

Its survey of 400 parents across England suggests a competition for nursery places now as intense as any battle to get into a desirable secondary school. One Middlesbrough hospital worker said the waiting list for her work creche was now two years long so 'before you were even pregnant you'd have to put your child on the list.'

'Parents want childcare that does not discriminate against them because of where they live,' the report, 'Facing the Childcare Challenge', concludes. 'In order to reach all parents and children, and in order for the Government to meet its child poverty targets, these services need to be rolled out beyond the 20 per cent most disadvantaged areas [which they have targeted so far].'

Children's Minister Margaret Hodge will give the first public signal this week that the Government wants to make a childcare place for every family a cornerstone of the next election manifesto.

'The vision must be to have high quality, accessible and affordable childcare for every child who wants it,' said Hodge, who will address a conference on Tuesday organised by the Daycare Trust. She is also expected to stress more places must be provided for children under five.

Whitehall sources are describing childcare as a 'new frontier for the welfare state', while Blairites believe an eye catching pledge on early years could symbolise New Labour's willingness to break down class barriers and improve life chances - the emerging theme of the manifesto.

Research shows all toddlers benefit educationally from good daycare, but disadvantaged children benefit most, possibly because their home lives are harder.

Andrew Adonis, then head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit, and Number 10 policy adviser Patrick Diamond made a recent fact-finding trip to Denmark, which provides heavily subsidised, full-time daycare virtually from the cradle. As a result Danish women are far more likely to work than their English counterparts.

A study led by economist Ed Straw - brother of the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw - presented to Ministers over summer argues that child care for every child between one and four could boost women's wages by up to 15 per cent over their lifetimes - because they would have to take less time out for children.

Ken Livingstone, the London mayor, will also publish a childcare plan for the capital on Tuesday. Ideas include forcing developers who build new housing to set up local nurseries as a condition of getting planning permission.

The Daycare Trust report found that even though the childcare strategy has targeted children on the breadline, it misses almost half of the poorest children.

- reprinted from the Guardian

Region: Europe ^[2]

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