

Academic claims government policy creates 'underbelly of childcare' in poor areas [GB] ^[1]

Author: Gaunt, Catherine

Source: Nursery World

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Jul 2009

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

A leading academic has claimed that the Government's policy of allowing childcare provision to be driven by market forces has led to appalling standards in some private nurseries in deprived areas.

Helen Penn, professor of early childhood studies at the University of East London, said there was an 'underbelly of childcare' involving 'quick-buck nurseries' which change hands regularly, run by unscrupulous businesses exploiting the tax credits system.

Her claims are backed up by one early years local authority adviser, who did not wish to be named, but who confirmed that there were a number of 'cowboy' nurseries that shut down or move if they encounter problems with Ofsted.

Professor Penn blamed the 'market incentive' which she said encouraged people to set up nurseries 'to cash in' where they can.

'They are encouraged under legislation in preference to the development of local authority provision. If you encourage private businesses in this way some people will cut corners, particularly if legislation is lax.'

While most discussion about private nurseries is at the top end of the market, she said many of these nurseries were set up in shop fronts and converted churches, with little or no outdoor space, often catering for illegal workers.

...

Professor Penn said that as local authorities no longer inspected nurseries, they may be ignorant of bad provision in their area, which usually only comes to light when a complaint is made.

She also said less frequent inspections by Ofsted had allowed poor-quality nurseries to avoid scrutiny by changing hands.

...

She added, 'Having a childcare market is problematic because you have a system that attracts the worst as well as the best of entrepreneurs. We need to have better systems in place.'

However, early years organisations said Professor Penn's experience was not typical of childcare for the poorest families.

Neil Leitch, director of communications at the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said, 'Sure Start, Neighborhood Nurseries and the initial focus of children's centres in the most deprived areas has directly contributed towards improving the consistency and excellence of childcare for all.'

But he said there was 'an increased reluctance to maintain local investment in pre-school development workers' who provide practical support to early years settings and are 'the eyes and ears of local communities'.

With local authorities likely to be under increased financial pressure, more instances like this could occur, he warned.

...

- reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[2]

International ^[3]

Tags: quality ^[4]

privatization ^[5]

legislation and regulation ^[6]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/11/academic-claims-government-policy-creates-underbelly-childcare-poor>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/09/11/academic-claims-government-policy-creates-underbelly-childcare-poor> [2]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international> [4]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization> [6]
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>