

MP blasts Sure Start reforms at Daycare Trust Conference^[1]

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Source: Children & Young People Now

Format: Article

Publication Date: 16 Nov 2010

EXCERPTS

Sharon Hodgson MP has attacked the government's announced changes for Sure Start centres in her maiden speech as shadow education minister.

She made her comments at the Daycare Trust annual conference in London following children's minister Sarah Teather's announcement that ministers will end the requirement for children's centres in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas to provide 40 hours of full daycare a week, made at the same event.

"This sounds crazy, when [deprived] areas are those where children's centres are often the only provider of good-quality care," said Hodgson. "If they start reducing the hours they can provide, how can parents, who are being told to get out and get jobs take them if they can't have a guarantee that centres will be open for the whole of the working day?"

Hodgson also criticised Teather's announcement that centres would no longer be required to employ people with both Qualified Teacher and Early Years Professional status.

She warned the decision could mean centres that were struggling with funding would make staff redundant, and that the standard of childcare would be lowered. She also said the change would impact on people studying for early years qualifications, putting into doubt whether such investment of their time had any worth.

"How Sarah Teather, who I do believe does care about children, can stomach this attack and defend it is beyond my understanding," she said.

Hodgson further challenged the decision to bring the Children's Workforce Development Council back into government, which was also announced by Teather at the event.

"The reasons we made [CWDC a non-departmental public body] was to improve skills and capabilities across the children's workforce better than the government could," said Hodgson. "To return it to the department with no guarantee or system of funding - the future of professional development within the early years sector looks very much uncertain."

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