

Childcare ratio changes proposed by the government will make children suffer ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Liz Truss trots out baseless arguments. Common sense tells you even the highest-qualified practitioner only has one pair of hands and one pair of eyes.

Government proposals to alter the childcare ratios in nursery schools are turning into a fiasco. Despite universal opposition from both parents and practitioners, the minister behind the strategy, Liz Truss, continues to trot out the same old, baseless arguments. She says that it's the qualification of childcare staff, not the number of staff, that matters. But common sense will tell you that even the highest-qualified practitioner only has one pair of hands and one pair of eyes.

The consequences of her actions will surely come back to haunt us. Children will suffer physically and emotionally.

She says that the government has consulted on these proposals. Rubbish. Perhaps the minister can explain why, as the largest membership organisation representing around 14,000 providers and the largest voluntary operator of childcare in areas of deprivation, we were not one of the 40 organisations she claims to have consulted before launching this ridiculous policy? Perhaps she was already aware of our members' position on the matter.

The More Great Childcare consultation about childcare ratio changes was a sham. At no point were the sector or parents asked if they thought ratio relaxation was a good idea. Instead, the consultation asked how best these changes could be implemented. How biased and distorted is that?

The minister says that the new ratios are voluntary. Tell that to childcare providers based in deprived areas - where it is proved that children need the most one-to-one care - who face the choice of either cramming in more children in a desperate attempt to lower fees and stay competitive, or risk closing and abandoning the families they support.

Last autumn, the Pre-School Learning Alliance consulted with more than 550 day nurseries and pre-schools about ratio changes and 94% said they would not be able to provide the same quality of care if ratios were relaxed; 75% said they would be unlikely to lower their childcare fees even if they relaxed the ratios, with many citing a desire to improve staff wages.

The consequence of ratio changes will be a reduction in the overall quality of childcare in this country. We will see the emergence of a two-tier childcare sector, with more prosperous areas retaining the current ratios because parents can afford the higher fees, while nurseries in disadvantaged areas will either be forced to close or relax ratios to take more children in order to remain solvent.

Is it a coincidence that current childcare ratios are found to be restrictive and unnecessary at the same time that the government is desperately trying to ensure that it can actually deliver on its promise of 130,000 places for disadvantaged two-year-olds by September, with another 130,000 places needed by next year? The government has admitted that there is currently a shortfall of 55,000 places. Increasing the number of children per childcare worker by up to 50% seems like a very easy way of creating more places without the need for any additional government investment.

-reprinted from the Guardian

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