



SAVE CHILDHOOD MOVEMENT

www.savechildhood.net

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Save Childhood Movement (SCM) launches the 'Too Much, Too Soon' Campaign

Movement calls for a stop to all developmentally inappropriate policy-making in early education

A collaboration of more than 100 early years experts and concerned supporters has united in signing an Open Letter calling for urgent change in England's educational policy-making. Supported by many notables such as Sir Al Aynsley-Green, Lord Richard Layard, Professor Guy Claxton, Penelope Leach, Susie Orbach, Barry Sheerman, Christine Blower and Chris Keats, they argue that children in England are being exposed to developmentally inappropriate pressures that damage their long-term health and wellbeing. The letter announces the launch of the larger campaign 'Too Much, Too Soon' – www.toomuchtoosoon.org that aims to unite with the wider sector in calling for a national debate on the purpose of education and the definition of success.

The core issues being highlighted by the campaign include:

- **the ignoring of children's developmental rights**
- **developmentally inappropriate pressures that are damaging to child wellbeing**
- **the pressure for school readiness**
- **the English school starting age**
- **the summerborn disadvantage**
- **the downgrading of play**
- **the introduction of baseline testing**

Further Background

The movement argues that although early childhood is recognised worldwide as a crucial stage in its own right, Ministers in England persist in viewing it simply as a preparation for school with the term 'school readiness' now dominating policy pronouncements, despite considerable criticism from the sector. Nearly 9 in 10 of the world's nations currently have a school starting age of 6 or 7 – and hardly any countries have England's effective starting age of 4. Amongst a number of specific criticisms the movement argues that current policy-making does not take into account the best interests of the child and therefore is not, therefore, in accordance with Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The government is now proposing to introduce baseline testing for children entering reception classes and the movement argues that this would be highly detrimental, especially for summerborn children who, according to the NUT, represent nearly one third of the annual intake, and that with such significant age differences the results would be statistically invalid. Research does not support an early start to testing and quasi-formal teaching, but provides considerable evidence to challenge it. It also does not support a 'one-size fits all approach' which at this stage of life is highly inappropriate.

The role of play is also being down-valued in England's nurseries. For many children today, nursery education provides their only opportunity for the active, creative and outdoor play that is recognised by all as vital for their physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. The movement argues that, rather than being something of little educational value, creative and expressive play underpins children's natural motivations, sociality and subsequent love of learning.

The success of Scandinavian education systems suggests that many intractable problems in English education – such as the widening gap in achievement between rich and poor, problems with boys' literacy, and the summerborns issue – could be addressed by more globally evidenced, child-centred and future focused policy-making.

“Instead of pursuing an enlightened approach informed by global best practice, successive Ministers have prescribed an ever-earlier start to formal learning. This can only cause profound damage to the self-image and learning dispositions of a generation of children. We as a sector are now uniting to demand a stop to such inappropriate intervention and that early years policy-making be put in the hands of those who truly understand the developmental needs and potential of young children.”

Too Much, Too Soon Open Letter, Sept 2013

The five objectives of the campaign are to:

- 1) re-establish the early years as a unique stage in its own right and not merely a preparation for school
- 2) protect young children's natural developmental rights
- 3) prevent baseline testing
- 4) reinstate the vital role of play
- 5) call for an English developmentally appropriate Foundation Stage for children between the ages of 3 and 7

Notes to Editors

For the open letter and the full list of signatories please see
<http://www.toomuchtoosoon.org/open-letter.html>

For a comprehensive list of the arguments please see
<http://www.toomuchtoosoon.org/the-arguments.html>

Press Contacts

General Press Enquiries

A list of specific contacts is available on request

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