

# eye

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# Rhetoric over reason will not fool sector

THE LAST few weeks have seen the good and the bad of the early years. The good has come in the form of the speedily arranged and highly organized #BigOfstedConversation events that were held around the country. So many people and organizations, who gave up their time to coordinate, host and attend these thoughtful and engaging think tanks, need to be congratulated. This is the sector mobilizing to address an issue head-on in a concerted and united way.

There seems to be growing mistrust toward the 'independent' inspectorate. There are many frustrations on behalf of the sector that need to be addressed, many mysteries obscured by official fog, and the coherent messages and questions coming out of the Conversations will allow the inspectorate's hierarchy to understand that its goals and methods might need to be, how shall we say, better communicated. Where once settings had both Ofsted and their local authority help monitor and shape provision, now there is only Ofsted. But why should we settle for this? Perhaps, with the local authority role diminishing, it is time for a new kind of monitoring and support system? Is it time to offer parents, and each other, a more suitable inspection regime, carried out by experts, with children's interests and developmental needs as the number one priority, rather than political agendas?

Now for the bad and my, how bad. You will have read Liz Truss' response to the open letter from the Save Childhood Movement – if you have not, you should, you really should. Ms Truss has been quiet of late, even less engaging with the sector. Since *More Affordable Childcare* and the fall-out over the calculations from the department that showed that affordable it certainly was not, we have not really heard much. But no longer. In response to the open letter, rather than address the sector, we were served with an astonishing article [available at [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)] that missed most of the points, insulted the knowledge and experience of almost everyone in the sector, and ended with a paragraph so truly, well, memorable, that it needs to be read to be believed. It would be easy to write an essay on that paragraph alone, littered as it is with: *'What sort of arrogance allows them to appoint themselves custodians of childhood, we can only wonder... this group's misguided, regressive, inaccurate, superstitious and dangerous idea... crush their future.'* [Daily Telegraph, September 13, 2013]

Is this 'on message' in the coalition's eyes? As the education secretary has shown, if hundreds of people (mostly those who know what they are talking about) disagree with you, they must be wrong, or lefties, or superstitious... End of story. But read the letter and you will see that its signatories are none of these things. They are childcare experts, but for some reason Ms Truss overlooks such expertise. Ms Truss has talked about raising the status of the workforce through new qualifications, perhaps it would help if these future childcare workers had some hope that their knowledge might help shape childcare policy? Or that they might be offered reasoned debate from their minister. That would be something, would it not?



**Neil Henty**  
Editor

**In the next issue of eye**

**Professional**  
Maureen Lee talks about Early Years Educator status

**Professional**  
Anne Purdon looks at sustained shared thinking

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