



### Early Years Sector unites in the call to put child wellbeing first

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10am April 23rd, 2014

In an unprecedented stand against what is seen as developmentally inappropriate and potentially damaging policymaking the leaders of England's key early years organisations have united in the call to protect young children's wellbeing. This follows the September 2013 launch of the Save Childhood Movement's widely supported 'Too Much Too Soon' Campaign.

In a letter to the leaders of all the main political parties the group has confirmed a shared concern about the Department for Education's consistent disregard of expert opinion and advice together with the development of early years policies that are:

- not backed by the sector
- not underpinned by global best practice and evidence
- not in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in particular Article 3 and the 2005 Special Comment No 7 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood' which calls for all decision-making to adopt the 'best interests of the child' principle

Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg has provided his own letter of support for the initiative.

In the lead up to the 2015 election the group has stated its intention of asking parents, grandparents, carers, teachers and other concerned voters to take into consideration whichever political party best demonstrates:

- 1) a more open, transparent, inclusive and child and family focused approach to early years policymaking
- 2) an approach that recognises human wellbeing and social capital as vital measures for growth that must be appropriately balanced with economic aspirations
- 3) the kind of positive values that we all wish to see in a more equitable, healthy and caring society

The group endorses the Save Childhood Movement's recently published Early Years Manifesto 'Putting Children First' as an example of what can be achieved through more thoughtful and evidenced-based collaboration and urges the parties to adopt the three core elements and eleven policy points as key elements within their own election manifestos.

*"We are committed to ensuring that political systems safeguard the health and wellbeing of young children as citizens with developmental rights and freedoms and, over the next year, we aim to be increasingly active as a sector in ensuring that this is seen to be the case. We are also keen to offer our combined knowledge and understanding to policymakers in order to better substantiate the evidence and to ensure that the future wellbeing and attainment of English children is not compromised by developmentally inappropriate practice." SCM Early Years Alliance Joint letter – 22/04/14*

Similar levels of concern are being expressed by the major teaching unions with the recent NUT conference now formally supporting the aims of the Too Much Too Soon Campaign (Conference Press Release 21.04.14) and discussing the possibility of a boycott of baseline testing (BBC News 21/04/14), and Mary Bousted, General Secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), sharing her own concern about Britain being in danger of “institutionalising” infants by forcing them into full-time childcare at an increasingly young age (Telegraph 07/04/14)

**Wendy Ellyatt, Chief Executive, Save Childhood Movement:**

*“It is startling to see the language used in the recent statements from the DfE and Ofsted, convey such a deficit-based approach to childhood where young children are still perceived as in need of instruction and testing and the greatest measure of success is whether they are made appropriately ‘ready’ for school. We urgently need a more constructive, holistic and asset-based approach that recognizes the child as a citizen with developmental rights and freedoms that need to be respected.”*

**Pasi Sahlberg, Author of Finnish Lessons, Visiting Professor of Practice Harvard University Graduate School of Education**

*“I share with others a growing global concern about the current increase in developmentally inappropriate policymaking together with education systems that prioritise standardization of teaching and learning, competition over enrolment and test-based accountability over child and family happiness and wellbeing. The frequently quoted OECD’s PISA study does not support such a focus, nor does it support the current faith in market mechanisms as the best vehicles for whole system improvements. It is clear that more child-friendly and trust-based systems can be equally, if not more, effective in terms of later attainment.”*

**OECD - Starting Strong III – A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2012**

*“Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.”*

**Notes to Editors**

**1. Recent policy announcements**

In the last few weeks the sector has seen four major announcements:

- despite sector-wide opposition to the idea, the introduction of baseline testing and the announcement that the EYFS Profile will no longer be compulsory
- government confirmation that it will not go ahead with the widely supported recommendations made by Professor Cathy Nutbrown in the Nutbrown Review

*“This threatens the future status of the profession, limits career progression and denies some of the most vulnerable children the best that we can offer.”*

*Professor Cathy Nutbrown*

- Head of Ofsted Michael Wilshaw's recent letter to Early Years inspectors calling for increased focus on teacher-led instruction and the early years as primarily a preparation for school readiness
- the Ofsted Report denouncing the existing quality of early provision and saying that school would be the best place for disadvantaged two year olds

## 2. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Article 3 of the convention states that

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, **the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.**

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child **such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being**, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, **in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.**

## 3. UNCRC General Comment 7, 2005

<http://www.weebly.com/uploads/2/0/3/8/20381265/generalcomment7rev1.pdf>

For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning.

The education of the child shall be directed to **“the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”** and that this must be achieved **in ways that are “child-centred, child-friendly and reflect the rights and inherent dignity of the child.**

The Committee urges States parties to take all necessary steps to ensure that parents are able to take primary responsibility for their children; to support parents in fulfilling their responsibilities, **including by reducing harmful deprivations, disruptions and distortions in children’s care; and to take action where young children’s well-being may be at risk.**

States parties must ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for early childhood conform to quality standards, particularly in the areas of health and safety, and **that staff possess the appropriate psychosocial qualities and are suitable, sufficiently numerous and well-trained. Provision of services appropriate to the circumstances, age and individuality of young children requires that all staff be trained to work with this age group.** Work with young children should be socially valued and properly paid, in order to attract a highly qualified workforce, men as well as women. **It is essential that they have sound, up-to-date theoretical and practical understanding about children’s rights and development (see also paragraph 41); that they adopt appropriate child-centred care practices, curricula and pedagogies; and that they have access to specialist professional resources and support, including a supervisory and monitoring system for public and private programmes, institutions and services.**

4.0 The Save Childhood Movement's Early Years Manifesto – 'Putting Children First' was published on the 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 and calls for:

- 1 an integrated, holistic and appropriately financed system built upon
- 2 an evidence-based understanding of the child as
- 3 a citizen with developmental rights and freedoms

- Ends –

To access the joint letter please go to

<http://www.toomuchtoosoon.org/160414-letter-to-the-political-parties.html>

To access a pdf of the manifesto please go to

<http://www.savechildhood.net/putting-children-first.html>



For further information or to request interviews, please see the attached contact sheet or contact SCM Press Officer Hattie Garlick – e:hattie@savechildhood.net m:07796 266 705